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NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT BUSTAMANTE

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

G. KURT PIEHLER

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TRANSCRIPT BY

G. DOROTHY SABATINI

Kurt Piehler: This begins an interview with Mr. Robert Bustamante on June 11, 1996, in Metuchen, New Jersey, with Kurt Piehler. I would like to begin by asking you a few questions about your life before Pearl Harbor. You grew up in Southern California. I was out there this February; it must have looked totally different in the 1920s and 1930s.

Robert Bustamante: Totally different. As a matter-of-fact, there are towns and even cities now that didn't exist when I lived there. It's grown that much and particularly during the war [and] since the war, because there was a tremendous influx of people from the East Coast and from the South, from all over, going to California, soldiers and servicemen that had been stationed there and liked it. So, they figured, "After the war, I'm going to live here," and my idea was, "Everybody's moving to California, so, I might as well go the other way and stay in New Jersey." [laughter]

KP: You were born in El Paso, Texas.

RB: Yes.

KP: Why did your family move to California?

RB: I don't know. I think it was just looking for work, actually, because I was from a very poor family and my family had migrated from Mexico into El Paso. From there, the idea was to find any kind of work or labor and I think that's what it was, migratory work there, that headed toward California, and [they] stayed there, fortunately. We didn't continue to move from one place to another. The family just stayed there. Dad was a good salesman and he got a job as a car salesman and that's what he did. He sold cars all his life and did well at it.

KP: How tough was the Great Depression on your family?

RB: Very, very, because it was a large family, a Catholic family. There were six children altogether. I was the eldest and I can't remember too much about the difficulty, the financial difficulty, I just know that we went through it. How Dad ever managed to do that, I don't know, but we survived.

KP: Did your father stay employed during the Depression?

RB: As far as I know, yes.

KP: Yet, he was selling cars, which I would think would have been difficult then.

RB: Yes, but I guess he was doing other things as well, in-between. He was probably selling cars as an off job or something. I really don't know, but I have to assume that he was also doing other things, like, during the season, picking oranges and things like that, seasonal work that used to come and go.

KP: Did your mother ever work outside of the home?

RB: No, no. In those days, the wife stayed home, took care of the kids.

KP: How big was your family?

RB: Six children, yes, two boys, the first one and the last one, in-between were four girls.

KP: You attended junior college.

RB: Yes, community college in California, in Ventura, California, and it's still there. It is known as Ventura College, but it's a community college, a two-year college.

KP: While you were growing up, had you wanted to go to college?

RB: Yes, yes. I had wanted to, but I didn't think I was going to be able to afford it and, fortunately, the community college was near enough that I was able to go, be bused there, and so, that's what I did.

KP: What did you study in college?

RB: I was studying accounting, actually. That was my major.

KP: Did you plan on becoming an accountant?

RB: Yes, a CPA. I'm glad I didn't, by the way. [laughter]

KP: Why?

RB: Because it's not my nature. Now that I've been through the mill and know what my career has been, I know that I would never have been happy as an accountant. However, I'm glad that I knew the basics, the fundamentals of accounting, because it helped me very much later on in my years in management.

KP: The region of California that you grew up in was predominately agricultural and very rural, compared to what it is today.

RB: Pretty much, yes, yes, no doubt.

KP: It sounds as though there was a family connection there. Your father sometimes worked on the seasonal harvests.

RB: Well, it was all around us. To go to school, from where I lived, to go to school, and it was only, I would say, a total of what today would be about eight or ten blocks, I had to go through a walnut orchard, and then, partly through a lemon orchard to get to school. I mean, that's how it was, beautiful. When I go out there now, to visit my family, and I see what used to be orchards and orchards of fields and there's nothing there but houses and buildings, it's terrible. It's depressing, really.

KP: Did you work while you were in high school and college?

RB: Yes, I worked as a shoe salesman in a shoe store, just selling shoes after school, when I was in high school, just to earn money, pin money.

KP: I get the sense that, by the late 1930s and early 1940s, your family was doing okay, financially.

RB: Well, by the late '40s?

KP: Late 1930s and early 1940s.

RB: Well, I think they were doing [okay], they were getting by. It's about as good as you can do. They were getting by and I was helping myself with my part-time job and on weekends, to buy my own clothes and things, to help out. In general, I think, one thing we did have was family unity and lots of love, lots of caring, which is essential, and, today, even if a family has a lot of money, if you don't have that, you really don't have anything.

KP: How were you able to afford tuition? Did your parents help out? Did you get a scholarship?

RB: There was no tuition at the community college.

KP: It was like City College of New York.

RB: That's right, that's right.

KP: Was admission competitive?

RB: I don't recall, really, what kind of tests [we had]. We did have to go through some examinations, but I don't recall, really, how severe they were, how difficult, but it didn't seem, to me, to be too difficult. I never really had too much trouble, I mean, with any of my schooling.

KP: Did you want to go on to a four-year college?

RB: Well, I'll tell you, during my senior year in high school and after that, actually, between graduating from high school, which was in '39, until college, I stayed out of school for a year and worked. There was another shoe shop. I had the reputation of being a good salesman at the shoe store, so, a friend of ours, who opened a store in another town nearby, ten miles away, wanted me to run it, be the manager. So, that's what I did after graduation and I didn't decide to go back to school until the following year. I felt that this was not really going to get me anywhere. This is not what I wanted to do and I, at that point, started thinking of two things--education, on the one hand, college, beyond the community college, but, also, the dark clouds of war were hanging over all of us. You couldn't plan too far ahead, because you knew that, in all probability, before

you got beyond where you were now, you were going to be drafted, that there was going to be a war. The war was coming. It was quite evident, so that you couldn't look that far ahead.

KP: When you say that you expected to be drafted, did you expect to be taken in the peacetime draft of 1940? [Editor's Note: The Selective Service Act of 1940 required all twenty-one to thirty-five-year-old males to register for the draft. These age parameters were expanded to eighteen to forty-five years of age after the United States entered the war.]

RB: Yes, yes. I knew that this was coming.

KP: You mentioned that a friend of yours was in the Army and was captured in the Philippines. Was he part of the peacetime draft?

RB: No, he was not drafted--he volunteered. He volunteered before Pearl Harbor and he was out there. He's a very good friend of mine. He's still alive, by the way. He lives in Southern California. I had a high school teacher, history teacher, who was also the football coach, who had been a swabbie in the Navy, before he graduated from college, I guess, before he became a coach. [laughter] Anyway, he was always telling us about the Navy, always telling us that he would never regret having been in the Navy because it taught him so many things, discipline, camaraderie, all these things that you don't get unless you're in that kind of a setup or, perhaps, in a military school, an academy or something, but, in general, you don't get that. So, when I heard these stories, I always felt, "Gee, that sounds like fun. Rather than just cast my future to the winds, I might think of something like that, later on." As it turned out, because of my nearsightedness, I couldn't get in the Navy anyway.

KP: You mentioned that you wanted both the Navy and the Air Corps over the Army.

RB: Yes, that's right, that's right. [laughter]

KP: You were surprised by the attack on Pearl Harbor, but it sounds like you were thinking of the war before December of 1941. [Editor's Note: Japanese forces attacked the American naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on December 7, 1941, thrusting the United States into the Second World War.]

RB: Well, our history [course] at the college was very much up-to-date on what was going on in the world and our history teacher was always bringing the *Time* Magazine in and *Newsweek* and he would focus on what was going on. So, we had a pretty good idea of what was going on and, from there, he would also extrapolate into what could be coming as a result of today's actions and yesterday's actions. That's why I had an idea that this was going to come. Still, it came as a big surprise. Obviously, Pearl Harbor would surprise anybody, but it seemed as though, whether we would be in the war or not, we still were helping the British, with the lend-lease, and so forth, and there was still some activity and the peacetime draft was proof of it.

KP: What did you think of all-out aid to Britain in 1940 and 1941?

RB: I didn't think too much of it one way or the other. I mean, I wasn't against it, but it didn't register too much. I didn't realize the importance of it.

KP: Many interviewees who grew up in New Jersey remember distinctly a very active *Bund* in the area and Italian-Americans often recall that members of their families supported Mussolini. Did you see any of that when you were growing up?

RB: No.

KP: There was no *Bund* activity or pro-Mussolini sentiment.

RB: No, because, where I lived, you didn't really have an Italian community at all, to speak of. One or two kids in school were of Italian descent. That was it.

KP: Did you grow up near any Japanese-American communities?

RB: No. There were a couple; actually, there were three in my class. In my high school class, there were three Japanese, Americans of Japanese descent, and they were moved out. One of them still is in contact with me and he lives in Long Island. He was in the war, with the *Nisei* in Italy, but his family suffered, of course, the terrible consequences of having been of Asiatic descent or Japanese descent, but that was it. [Editor's Note: Executive Order 9066 ordered the relocation of Japanese-Americans into internment camps.]

KP: What did you know about Japan before Pearl Harbor? Even though you lived in California, you seemed primarily concerned about events in Europe.

RB: Pretty much. Maybe I'm wrong, maybe I just don't recall, but my focus, certainly, was on Europe and, as far as I can recall, it wasn't considered an immediate threat. I mean, the Japanese were there; we were negotiating with them. That was going on, but it didn't appear as though they would ever dare do anything in a bellicose sense at all. [laughter] [Editor's Note: The United States and Japan held peace talks in Washington, DC, from November 20, 1941, to the day of the Pearl Harbor attack on December 7, 1941.]

KP: You were quite surprised on December 7, 1941.

RB: Oh, my God, yes, I should say--not only surprised and shocked, but I was angered. It's something that you just can't imagine happening. I mean, when you feel superior, and perhaps we shouldn't have felt superior, because, obviously, when it comes to preparedness, we were not superior, but, anyway, a big country like this and you look on the map at little Japan, it's a flea.

KP: I get the impression that you were eager to get into the service.

RB: Not really, not in the beginning. My plan was, I was fortunate in drawing a draft number that was not immediate. It was scaled back a bit, but, then, so many of my buddies were going into the service and volunteering. The movies had a lot to do with it, because they had all these

pictures that brought the patriotic fervor into people and you could see what was going on and you knew it was coming, sooner or later. So, that's why I figured, "No, I'm going to [go]."

KP: Your first inclination was to wait for your number to be called.

RB: Yes, yes, but that didn't last very long.

KP: You mentioned the movies. Did you watch a lot of movies while you were growing up?

RB: Yes, because there was no TV. That was the main source of entertainment in those days. In fact, the news, Fox Movietone News was the news, other than newspapers, of course. So, yes, movies were very important and the movie industry knew this. They realized it and they took advantage of this, and so did the government, to inculcate this feeling of patriotic fervor, this idea that, "I'm going to join in and defend;" not only that, but a lot of the movie stars themselves were joining. So, that was evident. I'll tell you, in this country, it was a time of unity, a time that hasn't been seen since and probably never will be, because there was no dissension, there was no antiwar sentiment, there was no this and that.

KP: In the 1930s, there were a number of "antiwar" films that focused on how bad the trenches of World War I had been, such as *All Quiet on the Western Front* [(1930)]. Did you see any of those movies?

RB: Well, *All Quiet on the Western Front* was about World War I and things were quite different during World War II. So, it didn't, at least in my case, affect me at all.

KP: In other words, you wanted to join the Air Corps or the Navy because it was more glamorous, not necessarily to avoid the trenches.

RB: Well, that too, but, basically, because it was more glamorous, yes, especially the Air Corps, now known as the Air Force, but, of course, to be a pilot. I mean, to be in the Air Corps and just be a dummy on the ground, cleaning up the fuselage or whatever, I mean, that was not the idea.

KP: You wanted to be a pilot.

RB: Oh, sure, and, even beyond that, a fighter pilot, not one of these big Flying Fortresses.

KP: Why was the Air Corps so glamorous to you? Had you ever flown?

RB: No, no. Don't you think it's glamorous, even today?

KP: No, I agree. I am surprised by how dangerous the Air Corps in fact was. Yet, it still had a very glamorous image.

RB: Yes, extremely, no doubt, but, you see, you don't think of things like that. You know that war is dangerous to begin with, you know that there is an element of risk and, actually, that's what made the war years so fabulous, because it was a time of exhilaration. You were very

much alive, not knowing if you're going to be around alive tomorrow, but, today, you're very much alive and you lived for today. This is the sort of thing that can only exist during wartime.

KP: In your memoirs, you discussed the unity of the war years, but you also recalled the zoot suiters. There was quite a bit of tension between the zoot suiters and the Los Angeles Police.

RB: Yes; not so much the police, no. The zoot suiters would fight among themselves. The gangs of zoot suiters would fight, but, when the war started and the GIs started coming in, particularly from other parts of the country, they're the ones that were against the zoot suiters and vice versa. That was the main problem, right there. However, as I said in my memoirs, it didn't last very long, because the zoot suiters were drafted and, pretty soon, there weren't any zoot suiters.

KP: What was your take on the zoot suiters at the time? You mentioned that they predated the war. Did you know any zoot suiters personally?

RB: Yes. I had gone to school with some [boys] that became zoot suiters. I didn't have anything to do with them, because I was more the studious type and I had no interest in dressing up like that and going out and looking for fights and things like that.

KP: In a sense, the zoot suiters were an unsavory element.

RB: Yes, although, to them, it was not unsavory, and to a lot of the girls, either. It was kind of glamorous to see these guys with the great, big brims on their hats and their pants up to here, chains and the rest of it. It was very common, not too much where I lived, but, basically, in Los Angeles, which was not too far, sixty miles.

KP: However, in your community, they were on the fringe. There were only a small handful of them.

RB: Yes, just a few, that's right.

KP: Your parents would have preferred it if you had not had to go into the military, correct?

RB: Well, of course, absolutely.

KP: Had your father served in the military?

RB: No. I don't know, he was in-between, somehow. He had nothing to do with World War I or World War II.

KP: Your brother was too young to serve.

RB: Yes. He served later, in the Coast Guard, but after the war. I think it was even after the Korean War, yes.

KP: Did any of your sisters join the military?

RB: No, they didn't.

KP: How did the war change your family? Did your father keep selling cars?

RB: No, he joined the longshoreman's union and he worked in the war effort during the war, and then, he went back to selling cars after the war.

KP: There were very few cars to sell during the war.

RB: That's right, that's right. You could make good money doing what he was doing then, in the war effort, anyway.

KP: Did your mother go to work then?

RB: No.

KP: Did any of your sisters go to work?

RB: No, because Dad was kind of old-fashioned and he was very, very tight on the gals. He didn't let them go away to work or anything. He wanted them home, so, that's how it was. [laughter]

KP: After Pearl Harbor, there was a great deal of fear over a possible invasion of California. Do you recall that feeling in December of 1941 and January of 1942?

RB: No, I wasn't there then, no. There wasn't anything [much], not where I was, maybe on the coast, maybe San Pedro or the towns, the cities that are on the coast, but, where I was, no.

KP: You do not recall a real concern.

RB: No.

KP: You wanted to join the more glamorous branches of the military, but you were drafted into the Army.

RB: Yes.

KP: What do you remember about your initial induction? Where did you report to?

RB: I reported to Fort MacArthur in Southern California, I think just outside of Los Angeles, [in San Pedro], and then, I was sent for basic training to Missouri, to Camp Crowder, Missouri.

KP: During your induction, you were separated for training in radio.

RB: No, not yet.

KP: That happened at Camp Crowder.

RB: That's right, that's right, Camp Crowder. During the boot training, there were all sorts of tests given, examinations and aptitude tests and this and that, and that's how I wound up as a radio operator inductee.

KP: Did you want to go into the Signal Corps? Did you want to be a radioman?

RB: Well, if I had to be in the Army, that would be one of my choices, yes, because at least it's a little more glamorous and it has a little more mental ability requirement to it.

KP: It sounds like you did not want to be an infantryman.

RB: Oh, absolutely not. That would be the last. [laughter] I mean, not only me, that's true of everybody.

KP: Were there any other branches that you would have liked to join at the time?

RB: No, I didn't give much thought to it, really, maybe Quartermaster or something like that, but not really.

KP: Had you traveled outside of California before the war?

RB: No, I had not.

KP: I get the impression that, initially, military life was a profound shock for you and living in a different part of the country was very interesting to you.

RB: Yes, it was.

KP: What did you think of Army life? What were your initial impressions?

RB: I liked it, even if you had to get up in the middle of the night, it seemed like, at the break of dawn, but, no, I liked it, because it was quite different from what I'd been used to and because of the people I met, the fellows, the camaraderie, as I said. It was a routine that I enjoyed; the discipline, I liked that. Camp Crowder was just a boot camp. It wasn't until I got to Kansas City that I really started enjoying myself. [laughter]

KP: Boot camp could be …

RB: It was stifling in many ways, and you get tired, too. They put you through the mill, absolutely. [laughter]

KP: Do you remember going on forced marches?

RB: Oh, sure, all sorts of things like that.

KP: However, you had a great time in Kansas City.

RB: Oh, I did.

KP: You were living in a hotel.

RB: That's right.

KP: How long was your training there?

RB: Twelve weeks.

KP: How many hours would you train for each day?

RB: Oh, I guess, eight to ten hours a day, something like that, pretty much a normal day's work.

KP: After you were done with training, you were …

RB: Free.

KP: Where did you eat your meals?

RB: Well, there were cafeterias set up for the trainees and you could go there, or else, you could go to the USO or just go to a restaurant, but, of course, restaurants were not the choice, because we didn't have much money. We only made, I don't know, eighteen, twenty-one dollars a month, something like that, and so, it's better to keep that money to treat a girl one day, rather than to stuff yourself. [laughter]

KP: In a sense, you could eat when you wanted to. You were basically responsible for going to training; after that, you were pretty much on your own.

RB: Yes, that's right.

KP: However, in boot camp, there were more things for you to do.

RB: Well, I mean, you're corralled. I mean, you can't [leave]. In boot camp, to get into town, you'd have to go and get a pass and go on the bus and whatever and, here, you didn't need a pass; you're there.

KP: You played the saxophone while you were growing up. You enjoyed Big Band music quite a bit.

RB: Very much.

KP: Kansas City was a great place to experience the Big Bands.

RB: Yes, it was, because, in those days, the Big Bands would travel across the country and they would hit all the major cities, sometimes even the smaller towns, but, basically, the major cities. So, if you were in one of the major cities, [you could see them], and Kansas City was famous for jazz to begin with. This was where some of the orchestras had started. So, this was an ideal place. They had a big ballroom, comparable or similar to the Palladium in Hollywood, it was called the Pla-Mor in Kansas City, and the Big Bands would come there. So, I did get a chance to see Glenn Miller's Band there, in person. I had already seen some of the bands on the coast, before I went into the service, Harry James and Tommy Dorsey, but I hadn't seen Glenn Miller. So, Glenn Miller, I did see live, with all the original people with it, in Kansas City and it was just great.

KP: What did you think of the Midwestern personality and the Midwestern girls? As a Californian, were there any differences or similarities that you noticed?

RB: Yes, I think the Midwesterners were different from either coast. They're more the basic, root American, I guess you would call them, more quiet, more reserved, very honest and very agreeable, nice people. Of course, in those days, people would come to Kansas City to work in industry, the war industry, from other places. I met girls there that had come from Texas and from Oklahoma and other places. So, it wasn't just the Missouri people, but [the] Midwest in general, yes. I think they are the root of the American pedigree.

KP: It sounds like soldiers could get a lot of dates in Kansas City.

RB: Yes, because all the local guys were gone. I mean, they'd been drafted and the Army would never keep you where you were drafted. They would send you as far away as possible, so [that] you wouldn't get homesick, I guess. So, no, they were.

KP: What would you do on dates in Kansas City? Where would you meet women? Where would you go?

RB: Basically, at the USO. The girls would be patriotic enough to go and dance with GIs there, and then, if they liked each other well enough, you could always get a date for some other place, a Sunday in the park or things like that.

KP: You were an acting sergeant in Kansas City. Did you enjoy being a sergeant?

RB: Yes, I did, yes, because I was in authority and I was a leader. I guess I've always been a leader, didn't realize it at the time, [laughter] but [I have] since then. So, yes, it was exhilarating.

KP: It also sounds like you were disappointed at not becoming an instructor, especially since you came so close to being one.

RB: Yes. Well, it was a disappointment, yes, no question, because I liked what I was doing and I liked where I was and I was able to do it. I mean, otherwise, I wouldn't have been considered. I had an aptitude for the radio work and I don't know if I had an aptitude for teaching it or not, but, obviously, I could've learned that, I think.

KP: You had a roommate who had a really hard time with the material.

RB: Yes, very hard. There's quite a few of the fellows that [did]. I don't really know why they kept them there. Sometimes, the Army doesn't do that. If you don't make it the first time around, you're out, but, yes, a lot of the fellows had quite a big problem.

KP: In other words, if you could not make it, they just held you over for another class.

RB: As far as I know, they were just there. No, they weren't held over for another class. No, after the class graduated, I think, then, when they were dispersed, the ones that had not been able to keep up were probably not sent into radio work.

KP: They were probably reassigned.

RB: Yes.

KP: However, it was not a situation where you would look around and see that people had disappeared.

RB: No.

KP: People did not disappear during this twelve-week program.

RB: No, no, they did not. One thing I organized, my class was C-4A, I'll never forget C-4A, but, anyhow, I organized a basketball championship between the various classes and I wasn't a very good basketball player, but I was a good organizer. So, I started that and everybody got very interested in it and, even when our class graduated and left, it was going full blast. So, I was glad that that was [still going].

KP: That was your idea.

RB: That was my idea, yes.

KP: Do you recall anything else about your stay in Kansas City?

RB: Only that I liked it very much. I've always had a special place in my heart for Kansas City, Missouri, not Kansas. It's all right, Kansas is all right, but it's more of a small town.

KP: You mentioned that you could not drink in Kansas.

RB: That's right.

KP: Have you been back to Kansas City?

RB: Once, yes, but long afterwards. I went back there, I would say, maybe six, seven years ago, maybe more than that, ten years ago, and it's entirely different. I was looking for the Kay Hotel. It's not there. [laughter]

KP: You were not promoted to sergeant. It sounds like you were disappointed at that.

RB: Well, yes, but, in those days, I mean, it was early in my career, so, not keeping the sergeant's stripes, at that point, really didn't bother me, because I still had a corporal's stripes and I knew that I was going to be [promoted]. I mean, you didn't have to have too much upstairs to make sergeant. It was a question of time and seniority, like some of the union people are today. It's seniority, rather than brains. So, I shouldn't say that, but it's true. In any case, no, it didn't really bother me. Well, where I did give up getting my sergeant's stripes was in Washington. There, they were already on order, let's say, and, because I left Washington to come to Rutgers, I didn't get them. That, I regret, because of the money involved, yes.

KP: Your class was broken up and you were assigned to different units. Were you surprised that you were posted to the War Department?

RB: Terribly. I mean, it's incredible. I just can't believe anything could happen like that, being in the service. I mean, in the service, the Army, for example, in particular, when you think of the Army, you think of, "I'm kind of the low man on the totem pole and [I will get] the worst job, in the worst branch of service." So, when that was [announced], and particularly when Augie was also mentioned, he was my best friend, we were on cloud nine.

KP: You had not been to the East Coast. You had never been to Missouri and, now, you were traveling across the country to Washington.

RB: Exactly.

KP: What were your initial impressions of Washington, DC?

RB: It was incredibly beautiful and exciting and it was a beehive of activity and there were plenty of girls there to date and everything. It was about eighteen-to-one, I think the ratio was. [laughter] So, it was fabulous from all points of view.

KP: Several people have mentioned that it was a very crowded city. In fact, finding housing was very difficult, even for military personnel. How cramped was Washington during the war?

RB: Yes, hotels, you couldn't get, because they were always reserved for the hotshots in the military, the big boys. So, if I'd try to get a hotel room, I probably wouldn't have been able to get one, which I couldn't afford one anyway. So, what happened was that many of the structures, many of the townhouses--yes, most were townhouses, but some were regular houses, two-story, three-story houses, like they have in Georgetown--these were converted by the owners into

rooms that they could rent out to the military people that were stationed out of quarters, in Washington, DC, or to the girls that'd come from other parts of the country to live and work there, so that you could find rooms. You couldn't find anything bigger than a room, an apartment or anything, or even a place where you could cook, but, of course, we didn't care about cooking anyway. So, it was just a question of finding the right area. So, we were able to do that without too much trouble. We wanted to be near enough to the bus that would take us to the Pentagon and we found it in the Northwest Section of Washington. It was a beautiful area at that time. We liked it very much.

KP: You lived in the Northwest Section of Washington and you worked in the recently constructed Pentagon.

RB: That's right.

KP: You mentioned that your work would be divided up into shifts.

RB: Yes, it was.

KP: You mainly took the day shift.

RB: No, this was in Kansas City when I was on day shift only. No, here …

KP: The shift rotated?

RB: Yes, they rotated, I think every two, three weeks. I don't recall exactly, but they rotated. You got a piece of each one, the daytime shift, the graveyard and the swing shift, all three.

KP: It sounds like the day shift was preferable.

RB: In Washington? Well, I don't know. In Washington, it didn't matter, because there was so much going on all the time, all day and all night. So, it didn't matter whether it was dark or light.

KP: There were always people out, it sounds like.

RB: Well, it seemed like, yes.

KP: As a lowly corporal, the Pentagon is full of generals and top brass.

RB: Yes, it was.

KP: Who do you remember bumping into?

RB: Only Burgess Meredith. He's the only one I can remember. He was an officer, yes, I think it was in the Army. He was an officer in the Army. I don't remember what rank he was, [a captain in the Army Air Forces]. He was not too high when it comes to the Washington, DC, group, but, still, he was an officer.

KP: He was a public figure then.

RB: Oh, yes. Yes, I was hoping to get a look at his wife, too, but she wasn't around, Paulette Goddard. [laughter]

KP: You were getting all these important messages. Initially, some were in code.

RB: Yes. No, the ones that were in code, we [could not read].

KP: The ones that were not in code, that were just clear, what kind of messages do you remember getting? Did you ever look at some of the messages skeptically?

RB: Not really, because it's all you can do to keep up with taking what's coming across, instead of stopping to think. If the messages had been one every ten minutes or so, then, you could sit and [ask], "Now, what did they say?" but you didn't have time for that, because it came through, you took down, letter by letter, as it came across on the wireless. It was on a tape, the tape just went by, you took it down, and then, you'd wait for the next one. So, you didn't get as much of a chance. Most of it was, well, the ones that were not classified were basically about provisions and things like that, requirements and the weather, nothing about the next operation or anything like that.

KP: Yes.

RB: But, all the logistical matters that were involved.

KP: How many messages would you take down in a given shift?

RB: I don't recall. I can't.

KP: It sounds like you were constantly taking messages down.

RB: Pretty much.

KP: Your job was not to wait for something to come up.

RB: No, there were plenty, and I wasn't the only one there. There were quite a number of guys taking messages, because you were taking from different places, North Africa, for example, or you would be taking them from the Solomons, the Aleutians or anywhere. It depends.

KP: How many men would be on a given shift in the message center?

RB: Oh, I don't know. There were quite a few there. I would guess about a hundred, but not all taking messages. Some were doing other things besides operating the radio in the message center. It was not a very big unit, but I would say about a hundred people, each shift.

KP: In shifts, all together, that is three hundred.

RB: That's right, yes.

KP: You liked this duty quite a bit. It was both challenging and exciting in the Pentagon.

RB: Oh, sure, that's right, very much so. You could get lost there. In fact, once I did get lost there, [laughter] walking, walking, walking around. Pretty soon, you'd bump into yourself, because it goes around this way, but it's such a huge place. It was a fabulous place.

KP: What did you do in Washington when you were not working? How many shifts would you do in a week?

RB: One a day.

KP: One a day; even on Sunday?

RB: No, we had a day off. I don't think it was Sunday, but we had a day off.

KP: You would have a day off. Otherwise, you worked six shifts a week.

RB: Yes, that's right.

KP: When you were off, what were some of the things that you did?

RB: Looking for girls. [laughter]

KP: Was the USO …

RB: That was one of the favorite places for that, yes.

KP: Where would you go on dates in Washington?

RB: In Washington itself, there, the skating rink, Glen Echo in Maryland. You could go to Maryland, you could go to Virginia. It's not just the District itself, it's a whole community there that surrounds the District, which today is much better than DC, but, in those days, DC was great.

KP: You liked the duty you had, but you had a feeling that this was going to be temporary, that you were not going to stay the rest of the war.

RB: Well, I knew; not just a feeling, that's how it was.

KP: People would eventually be transferred out.

RB: Yes.

KP: Did you get any sense why the Army did that?

RB: Sure, because they wanted experienced people as replacements overseas, for General Mark Clark, for all the units that were overseas, the Fifth Army, the Eighth Army, and so forth.

KP: In a sense, while you were good when you had this job, you were even better when you were done with your duty in Washington. Was that your sense, why they portioned you out?

RB: I really didn't know for sure, but I just assumed that that's how it was.

KP: Did your ability to take radio code get better as you did more of it?

RB: Not really. There was no need for it, because that's about the speed that the messages came through. If you didn't have that speed, you would miss the message. If you missed the message, then, what good are you?

KP: In other words, you would always catch your messages. Did you ever miss a message? It sounds like you really had to be quick.

RB: Well, you could stop it and you could ask, "What was that?" but you very seldom did that, because, sometimes, it was dangerous from the sending area. You couldn't repeat too much because those areas could be triangulated if there was enemy around.

KP: You did not want to ask that.

RB: You didn't want to ask that unless you have to, yes.

KP: While you were in the Pentagon, you heard about the ASTP and decided that was something that you would like to get into. [Editor's Note: The Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP), established in 1942, was an officer training program that serviced over two hundred thousand enlisted men in several specialties, including engineering, medicine and dentistry, psychology and foreign languages, at 227 colleges and universities. The majority of ASTP cadets were reassigned in the Spring of 1944, before completing the program, to meet manpower needs in other units, particularly in infantry, airborne and armored divisions destined for frontline combat.]

RB: Yes, I did, because it was going back to college and, obviously, this was--by then, as I said in my memoirs, I was determined to participate and help win the war, but I also wanted to live through it, to survive, and this was one way of doing it. I thought, "If you go to college, well, that's going to take a few more months and the longer I can stay in this country and still be in the service, the better."

KP: From that initial pump of adrenaline from Pearl Harbor, it seems like you increasingly realized that the military was a dangerous thing.

RB: Oh, yes, no doubt.

KP: Also, having one of your friends from your hometown captured in the Philippines.

RB: Well, that was way in the beginning. No, the shock was the news coming in from overseas from North Africa, and, basically, from the …

----------END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE----------

KP: From the news reports, you were increasingly realizing that there was a good chance that you could get killed if you were sent overseas.

RB: Oh, yes.

KP: It also sounds like there was quite a bit of prestige attached to the ASTP. In addition to it being a chance to get a college education, you would be part of a pretty select group.

RB: Oh, absolutely. Oh, it was built up as like Navy V-12, the same type of thing. I mean, this was the cream of the crop and it really was, because the people I met there were pretty well up there.

KP: When you applied for this program, you had no idea where you would be sent.

RB: No.

KP: You just knew you would be sent to a college.

RB: Yes, that's all, that's right, and it didn't matter, really.

KP: From both your memoirs and our conversation before we started the interview, that could be very fateful for you, where you would be assigned.

RB: Not necessarily, but it could, yes. As it turned out, it was.

KP: It turned out to be. For a lot of people, it was not.

RB: Yes.

KP: You would be assigned to Rutgers. Had you heard of Rutgers before?

RB: No, I had not. I mean, if it'd been named the New Jersey State University or something, I would have heard of that, but Rutgers, it sounded like rugby to me, like some team that plays rugby. [laughter]

KP: When did you come to Rutgers?

RB: It was in the Fall of '43.

KP: You reported to Rutgers. Did you come with a group of men or did you come individually to report in?

RB: Individually, yes, because we came from different units.

KP: Where did you live while you were at Rutgers?

RB: On campus. At that time, there was no Piscataway Campus, it was all New Brunswick, right across the street from Johnson & Johnson. Johnson & Johnson still hadn't moved to a new building. They were on George Street and the campus was right across, Old Queens, the same old facade and everything. There were dormitories there that were converted from two to fours and that's where we lived.

KP: Do you remember which dormitory you lived in?

RB: No, and I've tried to look it up and I don't think it's there anymore, because I haven't been able--everything is so different--I haven't been able to find it, to tell you the truth.

KP: What was your typical day like in the ASTP during the week?

RB: Well, it was a very full day, because of the classes, plus, military training; not military training exactly, but indoctrination. I mean, it wasn't a physical type training, but it was the mental type and what it was all about. Then, there was the studies and that took quite a bit, because to learn a foreign language in just a few weeks, it's not easy, to be able to become fluent enough to be able to speak it and understand it. So, it was concentrated. I guess the only time really that we had off was on weekends--I don't remember if it was a two-day weekend or a one-day weekend--that was all, but it was really the only time. At night, you had a chance to go into town. There was only a half-hour between the end of study and the curfew. To get to the Roger Smith, which was the only hotel in town, to get to the Roger Smith, you had to practically run all the way there, have a beer and run all the way back in order to make it before curfew. So, it wasn't really much of a chance to get away. Doris and I just got together on the phone. She used to call every night, but I really didn't get a chance to see her, except on weekends.

KP: A lot of men noted that the physical training in the ASTP was among the best physical training they got in the Army. Is that an accurate characterization?

RB: Well, I think it was at least for the swimming part, because I remember that. To be able to complete your program, you had to be able to swim, I don't remember if it was a quarter mile or I don't remember how long, I think it was a quarter mile, back and forth in the pool. It didn't matter which way you swam or what system you used, as long as you made it and it was not that easy, because most of the people could swim a little bit. I could swim maybe a block or so. Then, you'd get tired. So, to be able to do that took quite a bit, but it was interesting. It was fun and I remember the only days we used to get a good breakfast, ham and eggs and the rest, bacon and all sorts of things, was on the weekend and most of the guys would be gone on the weekend.

They'd go to New York or someplace else. So, if you were there, it was worth getting up for, getting up, having breakfast, come back to bed. [laughter]

KP: What do you remember of the classes? You decided to take Spanish, but what were your options? Also, for the interview, please explain why you decided on Spanish.

RB: Well, I could have taken, I think, any of the Romance Languages. I could've taken French, I could've taken Italian or Spanish. Those were the three.

KP: Your group was a language group.

RB: Yes, it was.

KP: You could not take engineering.

RB: No, I was not involved in engineering. I didn't qualify for that to begin with, nor did I ask for it, no.

KP: It sounds like you knew quite a bit of Spanish beforehand.

RB: Yes, I did. I could understand quite a bit and get along. However, it's rudimentary Spanish. It was Spanish that was spoken among family members, "What are you doing? How are you?" and so forth. There's a big difference between being fluent in a language and being able to translate or be an interpreter, a tremendous difference. You can do one and you can't do the other.

KP: Do you remember any of the instructors you had at Rutgers?

RB: Yes, I just remember the main instructor. His name was Dick Predmore, Professor Predmore, and there was another one that was also a Spanish instructor, but not mine. His name was (Hughes?), a good-looking guy. There were three. The other one was a Spaniard and all three guys had studied in Madrid--they studied in Spain; I don't know if it was Madrid, I think it was Madrid--together, so, they knew each other. They would tell us about the way college courses are taught there. A lot of them were taught in the café, instead of in the classroom. They would meet in the café and chat with the professor, and so forth, a very informal thing, but it was part of the curriculum. I found it interesting.

KP: Were your classes all ASTP?

RB: Yes.

KP: In other words, you did not have any civilians in your classes.

RB: No.

KP: How did the professors teach you? How would you compare the classes you had at Rutgers with those you had in Ventura? They were different subjects, but in general. Did they, for example, try to have the same informality that they remembered from Madrid?

RB: No. It was more formal. The ASTP was more formal than the college that I'd been to, yes, more formal, I think basically because it was military and there were military officers there in charge. So, this was just part of it. The professors realized that while they weren't in the service, all the other people were and subjected to military discipline of all types. So, I think maybe that's why it was.

KP: Did you ever see your professors outside the classroom? Were there any informal gatherings?

RB: No.

KP: They never had you over to their house.

RB: No, there was no time for that and, even on weekends, whenever you had time off, you wanted to get out of there. New York, I tell you, New York was so close and most of us were not from New York and we'd never seen the big city and that's the place to go. There was so much activity, there's so much going on, that it was just tremendous.

KP: New York was a big draw for you.

RB: Oh, sure.

KP: What were your initial impressions of both New Jersey and New York?

RB: Well, New Jersey was just another place. It wasn't any different from any other place, really. New York was, of course, because of the big skyscrapers and everything about it. It was colossal.

KP: Colossal; New York lived up to its billing.

RB: Yes, very much so, very much so, and the people were so friendly. I mean, you couldn't buy your own drink. You'd go into a bar and somebody would always be buying a drink for you because you were in service.

KP: Had that been the case in other places you had been?

RB: I don't recall; in Kansas City, no, not really, no.

KP: Just New York.

RB: Yes, basically New York.

KP: New York, where they would treat soldiers well.

RB: Yes. No, well, we were treated well all over.

KP: Yes.

RB: But, as far as buying you a drink, basically, it was New York, because, in Kansas City, I was mostly at the USO. I didn't go to bars much.

KP: In any of the places you were stationed, were you ever invited by a family you did not know to dinner?

RB: No, no, I did not; Doris' family, of course, but that's different. [laughter]

KP: Yes. At Rutgers, did you take any other courses besides Spanish? You mentioned learning quite a bit about Spain.

RB: Yes, I don't remember anything beyond that. I really don't recall anything beyond that. This was the three basic elements--the language itself, the history, not only of Spain, but of Europe in general, but Spain in particular, and then, the military indoctrination--but that's really the only three things I can recall.

KP: How many hours would you actually be in the classroom during the week? Was it more than three hours?

RB: Oh, yes. Well, it would be a full eight-hour day, at least.

KP: It was very intense.

RB: Oh, yes, it was.

KP: Were there men who could not keep up, that you knew of?

RB: No. Some were slower than the others, but everybody was able to keep up. I think they were selected and the ones that took Spanish had already taken Spanish in college or knew some, or the thing was true of other languages. That's why, in retrospect, I used to say to myself, "Well, if I'd taken Italian, I would be tri-lingual, because I would have the Spanish anyhow and I could have had Italian." So, in a way, I'm sorry I didn't do that, but, on the other hand, all the Italians were sent overseas to the Fifth Army, all of the Italians that I was with. So, there, I was glad I wasn't in the Italian class.

KP: Did you ever get to know any of the civilian Rutgers students?

RB: Only one, because he was Doris' cousin, and I think he's the one that gave my name to somebody and …

KP: Probably, yes.

RB: That was Bill Stalker, Billy Stalker, that's his name, and I knew him through Doris. He was still going to college, playing football, and then, he went into the Navy after that.

KP: What did you think of the civilians? It sounds like you and the civilians were at the same place, but you were very distant.

RB: There were very few civilians around, I'll tell you, and I guess they must have had their classes elsewhere, because I only recall seeing the ASTP people.

KP: Did you take part in any Rutgers traditions? Did you go to football games or other events?

RB: Yes, I think I did go to football [games]. I liked football very much and that was basically the season for it, but I don't recall too much about it. I don't really know if I was off on Saturdays and that's when the football games were played. I know I would have gone, I probably did go, but I don't recall.

KP: What about any intramural competition between the ASTP and the civilians?

RB: No, that didn't exist.

KP: One of the things that made the area unique was Camp Kilmer. You had this huge military base. Did you see a lot of GIs in town?

RB: Yes, there were a lot of GIs from Kilmer that would come into town and they would be at the USO, and so forth, or at the Corner Tavern, but they were very transitory, because this was pretty much a sendoff place into the ETO, so that they didn't stay there very long. You didn't get a chance to make friends with anybody because they were in and out and we were a small unit compared to the personnel at Kilmer. We were pretty much to ourselves, because there were few of us and we were a pretty close-knit group. We were so intense in our studies that we didn't really have a chance to go out and fraternize with the other guys.

KP: In your memoirs, you talk about meeting your wife. Was it at the USO?

RB: Yes, it was, right on Somerset Street, that's right.

KP: She was there to dance with the guys.

RB: That's right.

KP: You met that night and you obviously danced.

RB: I was in town in the afternoon and I saw a couple of girls walk by on the other side of the street, walking down George Street, and one of them was a pretty blonde and I said, "Gee, what a nice-looking gal," and then, I forgot about it. Then, I went to the USO and there she was and I

asked her to dance and it was Doris. She was a good dancer and we danced well together and we got along. So, I guess I asked her for a date the following Saturday or something, Saturday night, and that's how it was.

KP: Where did you go on your first date?

RB: We went to Newark, I don't know, some nightclub in Newark, which I wouldn't do today, but, in those days, you could go to Newark. I remember, we missed the last train back. It was one o'clock, and so, we had to wait until, oh, I guess their first train in the morning, four o'clock. Her sisters were all upset--oh, started off on the wrong foot, I'll tell you [laughter]--but it was inadvertent, just missed the last train home, because all it was was trains and buses, I mean, no cars or anything. Well, anyway, it worked out okay.

KP: You had a whirlwind romance, partly by the pressure of being in the service.

RB: Yes.

KP: Would you only date on the weekends?

RB: Yes, we would date on the weekends and talk during the week. Basically, that was it.

KP: What was Doris doing at the time?

RB: She was working, working at Carter Products [now Carter-Wallace], in the assembly line there. She had finished high school, but she didn't go to college, so, she went to work.

KP: Was she living with her sisters or was she living at home?

RB: Well, she was living with her one sister because her parents had both died when she was very young. So, she was pretty much an orphan and her older sister was taking care of her.

KP: You got married before the war ended.

RB: Before the deluge started here, yes. When I got married in February, I mean, there was no indication that the ASTP Program was not going to go on. Everything was fine.

KP: You had the sense that you should marry because you could spend this time together.

RB: Yes, and, from there, I'd probably be transferred to some other place in the States. I don't know, that's what I was thinking. You don't think the worst, you think the best.

KP: You were pretty optimistic.

RB: Very much so, yes.

KP: Looking back on it, would you have gotten married? This is a hypothetical "what if," but your planning, it sounds like, was a lot different than what happened.

RB: I don't know. I probably would have. I mean, you don't change your emotions just because of the element of danger creeping in. No, I probably would have.

KP: You had a very short honeymoon.

RB: Relatively short, yes. [laughter]

KP: After you got married, where did you live?

RB: Stayed at Rutgers.

KP: You stayed at Rutgers. You would see each other on weekends.

RB: That's right.

KP: The end of the ASTP sounds like a tremendous …

RB: Oh, it was a terrible disappointment, to all of us, I mean, including the professors and everybody. They couldn't believe it. Of course, the professors didn't know how the Army works and, by then, we were kind of used to the Army procedures, [laughter] but, still, it was a big shock. The biggest shock, of course, was going into the infantry. It would have been bad enough to say, "Okay, we're breaking you up--go back to your old units." I would have loved that, back to Washington, but, no, there's no way you could do that. [laughter]

KP: In some ways, you were surprised, but you also realized that the Army does that.

RB: Yes, but more shock than anything else, because of the way it was done, not so much because it had been done, but the way it was done, without any notification at all and any reasons why, any explanation, nothing.

KP: They just told you it was being disbanded. They did not say, "Because we need men."

RB: No, no.

KP: You were pretty close to finishing.

RB: That's right.

KP: Which made it even worse.

RB: Absolutely.

KP: You mentioned that Rutgers gave you credit.

RB: Yes, well, they said they would. I don't know if they did.

KP: You never checked.

RB: No, I never checked, because, when I got out of the service, I had a choice of either going back to college or going to work with Johnson & Johnson, which I had already decided that's what I wanted to do, provided I would have a chance to go overseas with them, because that's what I wanted to do, go to Latin America and utilize the Spanish that I'd learned. So, I decided that, "I'm going to go to J&J for a year. If it doesn't work, if I don't get a chance to go overseas, then, I'll probably go back to school."

KP: The ASTP training you got was fairly important in terms of making you fluent in Spanish.

RB: Well, not as fluent as I thought I was. It wasn't until I got to Latin America. [laughter] I mean, fluent, there are degrees of fluency. I was used to what's known here as "Spanglish." When you can't think of the word in Spanish, say it in English, or vice versa, not a problem, because this is true out in the Southwest and in California, all over where you have bi-lingual people. My own brothers and sisters, I mean, that's how they speak, but, in South America, you couldn't do that. If you don't know the Spanish word for it, just don't say it, because, if you use the English word, they're not going to know what you're talking about. So, that's where the difference was.

KP: It sounds like you had also enjoyed seeing different parts of the country. Would it be fair to say that you got a travel bug from this experience, seeing different parts of the country?

RB: No, I had always wanted that.

KP: You formed a number of close friendships in the ASTP and the different parts of the military. It sounds like you were disappointed with the ASTP breaking up because these were people you really liked.

RB: That's right, but I was used to that. Being in the service, you know that you're going to be broken up. You know you're not going to keep the same friends all the time, because you kept getting moved around. So, it was not unexpected, but I would have liked to have been together with some of the guys. The roommates that I had, we were so close.

KP: What about Doris? How did she take the news?

RB: Not very well. There's nothing you could do but commiserate with each other and take it from there.

KP: She decided to follow you to Camp Carson, Colorado.

RB: Yes.

KP: Did you want her to follow you? It sounds like that was something you discussed quite a bit.

RB: Well, all the guys wanted their wives with them, if possible, and she went with other wives, other Rutgers wives.

KP: How many marriages took place at the time? Did a number of people find wives?

RB: Not that many. I think most of the other Rutgers wives were already married when they got there. I don't remember anybody, other than myself, that got married in New Brunswick to a New Brunswick girl. I think I was the only one.

KP: How old were the people in the ASTP? Were they roughly all what might be considered traditional college age, eighteen to early twenties? Did you have people quite a bit older?

RB: No, not quite a bit older, because nobody in the service was even approaching thirty-five. The oldest, you would find a person that was thirty-two--that was old--so, in their twenties, but not necessarily of college age. Some of them were beyond college. I think some of them had even graduated from college and were taking this Spanish course.

KP: You got sent back to an infantry division. Initially, on the train ride, you expected that you would just be a grunt, an average infantryman.

RB: I didn't even think, because a division is pretty big and there's a lot of different slots you can fit into. You just hoped you'll get something that is decent, relatively decent.

KP: It sounds like you were lucky, because a lot of people I have interviewed got placed into units that were specialties that, in fact, they had no training for. When you got back, you were assigned to a radio company.

RB: Well, my spec was a high-speed radio operator and those are unique. So, the minute they saw that, they grabbed me--thank God. I mean, you don't find too many high-speed radio operators coming into a unit.

KP: That was really an important skill you had. It was a valuable skill.

RB: Yes, it was, much more than the Spanish. That didn't do me any good at all. [laughter]

KP: Were you able to get it all back, your high-speed radio skills?

RB: Yes.

KP: It sounds like you were a real natural for this, even though you had not practiced for almost a year, nine or ten months.

RB: Oh, yes, but it was entirely different, a lot easier, because you didn't have to go that speed that you did in Washington, DC. This was going back a few years, like going from college back to your sophomore year in high school.

KP: The high speed of a division, company or regiment was much slower.

RB: There was no high speed there. You did it by hand.

KP: You wrote it out.

RB: Yes, that's right.

KP: How did you and Doris like Colorado? You were in training.

RB: Loved it, loved Colorado Springs, beautiful place, never went back, but I would have liked to.

KP: You would be training six days a week.

RB: Well, yes. Sometimes, we'd get a chance to come in at night and spend the night with the wives, and then, go back the next morning, early, but, if we were bivouacking or if we were out on maneuvers or something, obviously, you couldn't do that.

KP: You joined an undermanned division that had already gone through quite a bit of training.

RB: Yes. [Editor's Note: Mr. Bustamante joined the 104th Signal Company of the 104th Infantry Division, nicknamed the Timberwolves.]

KP: What was your sense of the unit? Did you have any sense that this would be a good division?

RB: No. Hey, we just wanted to make the best of a bad situation and we were not welcomed with kid gloves. I mean, these guys, a lot of them, most of them, they resented the fact that we were coming in at the end. We didn't have to go through what they went through. We'd been in college while they were out on maneuvers getting mud all over their faces and everything and they called us "whiz kids."

KP: It does not seem like it was a compliment, either.

RB: No, not exactly, not at all. [laughter]

KP: I get the impression, from reading your memoirs, that you realized that you had it pretty good up to this point, the ASTP, the War Department, Kansas City.

RB: Oh, couldn't believe it, I mean. Yes, that's why I was saying to myself, "Maybe I'm being punished for having had it so good up to now." [laughter]

KP: You also, in a sense, were very lucky, because you had a very good skill that got you placed in a fairly good position, whereas many ASTP men found the choice jobs already taken.

RB: The worst areas.

KP: How long did you train in Colorado?

RB: Oh, I guess about four or five months.

KP: Is there anything about the training that you remember as particularly hard or interesting?

RB: No, it was survival training, what to do to survive. It was like everything that the division had been through, we had to go through in microcosm and do it in a split second as against the time that they had. So, it was intensive and it was difficult, because you had to acquire so many skills, self-protective skills, and so forth, wading yourself through minefields and using the bayonet and arming and disarming your rifle, all those things.

KP: It sounds like you went through basic, then, advanced--basic again, then, you did advance in a compressed time.

RB: That's right, yes, exactly.

KP: Did the ASTP men train as a group or with other replacements?

RB: No, the signal people trained by themselves.

KP: Signal people?

RB: Yes. Well, part of, most of, the training was by ourselves. Each regiment would have its own training, each battalion would have its own people training. We didn't train as a division together. There wasn't a war effort.

KP: In other words, it was not just the ASTP men.

RB: With the others, that's right. They had to do the same thing with us. Another reason why they were disgruntled--they'd already been through it and they had to do with us.

KP: The whole signal company had to go through this training and they were not too pleased. For example, you never used bayonet training.

RB: That's right, no, and didn't like it, either.

KP: Live ammunition, going under barbed wire.

RB: Sure, all that.

KP: You liked Colorado Springs a lot. Where would you go to have fun?

RB: You mean when I was with Doris, on weekends then?

KP: Yes.

RB: Well, we went up Pikes Peak or we would go to the Broadmoor. The Broadmoor is one of these great, big resort complexes, where they have golf tournaments, even today, Garden of the Gods, many places you could see, very special places.

KP: It sounds as if you liked Colorado.

RB: Very much.

KP: How about the people?

RB: We didn't have too much meeting with local people, because most of the people that were in town were GIs or some people that had to do with the war effort--they're not from there, really. We didn't get a chance to meet local people.

KP: When did Doris head back to New Jersey?

RB: Well, when we got our orders that we were going to go to the ETO--no, they didn't say ETO, they said to the port of embarkation. We didn't know which port of embarkation. It could have been California to go to the Pacific, but, when we got our orders that say, "Up until such-and-such a date, all wives have to be out of here," these were the orders. So, the wives had to leave and go back home, and then, wait and find out, "Where's my husband?" So, it was just fortuitous that, in my case, I wind up in Kilmer, where Doris already had returned to. I could have gone some other place.

KP: You did not know where you would be going.

RB: No.

KP: Where were you hoping to go and where were you hoping not to go?

RB: I was hoping to go to Europe. I didn't want to go to the Pacific.

KP: What about between Italy and France? You mentioned, in retrospect, you were glad you did not study Italian. Did you realize how tough the Italian Theater was?

RB: No, I was just glad that I didn't study Italian, because I would have had to go right then and there to the warfront, not because of Italy.

KP: When your ASTP group broke up, people who had Italian …

RB: They didn't go to camp in the States, like we did at Camp Carson.

KP: They had no refresher. They just got immediately sent out.

RB: That's right, that's it. That's why I was glad.

KP: Yes. I imagine, for those people, basic was a distant memory.

RB: Oh, sure.

KP: You were sent to Kilmer. Did you have your furlough before going to Kilmer?

RB: No, before we left Camp Carson, I had a furlough and that's when I took Doris to meet my family in California.

KP: You had a trip to California before going.

RB: Yes.

KP: What was that like for you and Doris?

RB: Well, it was a chance for her to meet my parents and for them to meet her. It was difficult for Doris, because, when you meet somebody's parents for the first time, plus, a bunch of sisters, I guess it was a little--well, she was shy to begin with and she would have to be, but it was all right. They got along pretty good.

KP: From what I have gathered, with such a close-knit family, except in wartime, you probably never would have married someone without introducing your fiancée to your family.

RB: Oh, no, of course not.

KP: How did your parents learn that you were getting married? Did you write to them?

RB: Yes, I told them, "I'm getting married," or, "I got married," I forget what it was, and, later on, I was thinking, "Gee, if I were my father, or my parents in general, but my father in particular, if I got word that my son was getting married, I would right away think, 'Well, he must have gotten himself in trouble. He must have gotten a girl pregnant or something.'" That's what would come to me, but it never occurred to me, at the time, but, later on, I said, "Gee, what would they think or what did they think?" [laughter]

KP: When did you learn that your port of embarkation was Camp Kilmer?

RB: No, just before we left Camp Carson, they said, "We're going to the East Coast."

KP: That was when you were fairly certain.

RB: Yes, that it was ETO.

KP: When did you learn that you were arriving at Camp Kilmer, which must have seemed very strange to you?

RB: En route.

KP: What was the experience of waiting to be sent out like, because, at Camp Kilmer, it is really obvious now that you would be going to war?

RB: Oh, yes.

KP: Were there any guys who went AWOL? Were there any disciplinary problems that you know of?

RB: No, none at all.

KP: Did you and Doris meet while you were at Kilmer?

RB: Yes, I think once. I think once. I know we met when I got back into Kilmer, but I'm not sure if we met on the way out, but I think we did. Certainly, we talked on the phone, but there wasn't much opportunity to do much. We weren't there that long.

KP: I know the Army really discouraged you from meeting anyone. They did not want to let you off the base.

RB: Yes.

KP: You shipped out of New York.

RB: Yes.

KP: What do you remember about the ship that you were on?

RB: Just that it was very crowded and that a lot of guys were seasick and it was no picnic. It was no fun at all.

KP: What bunk did you have? How high?

RB: I don't remember. [laughter] I don't even know if I had a bunk, might have been on the floor. I don't remember.

KP: You did not get seasick.

RB: No, I didn't.

KP: A lot of guys did.

RB: Oh, yes, many. Some guys couldn't eat for days, which is pretty rough. Our division was the first division not to go to England, first division to land directly on French soil, and we got there, oh, I forget how many days after D-Day, but it wasn't that long. So, we took it from there. We went into the Normandy area and we got bivouacked there, we stayed there a few [days], did some more training there, and then, our division was attached to the First Canadian Army for the push into Belgium and Holland.

KP: Going back to the voyage over, how concerned were you with U-boats?

RB: Well, we individually weren't concerned, because there's nothing we could do about it, but the people that were manning the ships and the people in charge of the transports, of course, were very much concerned.

KP: Were ships in your convoy attacked?

RB: I don't recall. I don't think so, because I would have remembered. I don't think that we lost any, no.

KP: You mentioned that there was not much to do when you were going over. How did you spend most of the time?

RB: Darn if I know, just chatting with each other, I guess.

KP: Any gambling?

RB: On the way back, there was a lot. Going down, going, I don't think there was room even.

KP: It was that cramped.

RB: [Yes].

KP: You landed in France. Did you regret not seeing England?

RB: No. Well, maybe in a way, but it didn't really matter. All we wanted to do was get off the ship.

KP: Even though you were heading into battle.

RB: Yes. Well, even if we'd gone to England, we would have gone into battle anyway.

KP: You just wanted to get off the ship.

RB: Yes. It would have been just a detour on the way to the mainland anyway.

KP: What were your initial impressions of France and what it would be like in the war zone?

RB: Well, we didn't see the France that I would have liked to have seen. We didn't see Paris or anything like that. It was Normandy and it was the hedgerow war and farm country, people that didn't speak the language I spoke.

KP: You saw a lot of destroyed things.

RB: Oh, yes. From that point of view, it was really not a shock, because I expected it, but, to see it first hand and to see the signs, "*Actung Minen*," "Get out of here--mines are here, everything is mined," it was a sobering experience. When we went on the way up to the front, up to Belgium, when you see all of the craters that the bombs had left and the buildings a shambles and you see the helmets, on a sword and the helmet on top of it, or on a bayonet and a helmet on top of it, those sort of things like that, that brings you into the realm of reality. You realize that this is happening and you're going to get shot at.

KP: Because of your radio experience, you got to see different parts of the division, much more so than your average frontline soldier. You started out in division.

RB: Yes, that's right. Actually, I started out in rear echelon, yes, not division. Rear echelon is behind the division headquarters. The division is not in the middle exactly, but farther, closer to the frontline, than the rear echelon, but I was glad I was in rear echelon. I wanted to stay there. I figured, "The farther away from the front I am, the better." I didn't realize that you could get encircled. When there are pincer movements, the rear echelon gets it in the rear, which is no fun. [laughter] It's worse, because, then, you have nobody, a few people that are remnants, but, at that time, it seemed fine.

KP: What were your duties like there?

RB: Well, we were in contact with the three basic [units], with the regiments, and with the division headquarters.

KP: You mention in your memoirs a lot of activity at both the rear echelon and division, a swirl of activity and officers conferring.

RB: At division headquarters, yes; rear echelon, not so much, because there weren't that many officers there. Division headquarters, there were a lot of officers and they knew where we were going and what we had to do.

KP: Rear echelon, in contrast, was much quieter.

RB: Yes.

KP: How long did you spend in rear echelon?

RB: Only the Belgian Campaign. In Holland, I was with division headquarters and, after we left Holland, we went into Germany. Then, I was up front with the regiment, the regimental headquarters.

KP: Signal Corps people were rotated between the different specialties.

RB: I don't know if the people in general were--I know I was, but I don't know if the others were. They may have been. Some of the ones that I am friendly with now, this fellow in North Jersey, he was at division headquarters throughout. He never was rotated.

KP: Why were you rotated?

RB: I don't know. I don't know, I just know that I was rotated.

KP: You got to see the different parts of the division.

RB: Of the division and how it worked, yes.

KP: Yes, more so than if you had been at the front or if you had been in the rear echelon.

RB: It was more exciting. I mean, I was glad, in a way, that I was there. I knew it was dangerous, but I didn't mind it.

KP: In division, you also got to see officers in action.

RB: Not really "in action," officers receiving messages and discussing the "what fors" among themselves, but not really in action, not military action.

KP: Not military action, but, for a lot of frontline people, division was a distant thing. They theoretically understand that people are …

RB: No, it's not that distant, no.

KP: It is not, yes.

RB: It changes. Sometimes, division can be very close to the front and, otherwise, it depends on whether your division is activated and, actually, whether it's at the foreground of the activity, like ours was when we took Cologne. We were the spearhead. Well, obviously, we were way ahead of the other divisions. So, it changes. [Editor's Note: The 104th Infantry Division entered Cologne on March 5, 1945.]

KP: Did you gain any impressions of the officers who were leading the division? Did anything stick in your mind?

RB: Yes, I think the general that was in charge of the division, General Terry Allen, was an excellent general. I had high respect for him. His name was Terry de la Mesa Allen and his

background stemmed way back to the days when Spain owned Colorado and all that area out to California, but he was a good one. He had been in charge of the First Division when it landed in North Africa. So, he was not new to it. The others, I didn't have too much contact with them. The ones in the Signal Corps, basically, most of them were what they called "ninety-day wonders" and they were okay, I mean.

----------END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE----------

RB: Are all your interviews this long? [laughter]

KP: Oh, yes. I have had interviews as long as six hours. This continues an interview with Mr. Robert Bustamante on June 11, 1996, in Metuchen, New Jersey, with Kurt Piehler. You mentioned that you had a great deal of respect for the sergeants, particularly in the Signal Corps.

RB: Not necessarily in the Signal Corps, but all over; in a combat unit, let's put it that way. In a combat division, the weight is really on the shoulders--not the decisions on where to attack, but what to do when you're told to attack and how to do it--it's all on the sergeants. The responsibility for leading, victory, is on their shoulders.

KP: You got to see division, and then, you were on the frontlines. What was a day like in the rear echelon when you were in combat?

RB: You didn't get as many messages. You were prepared and you got an occasional message, but it was more relaxed in that sense, in the sense of actually doing something. A lot of times, you just sat around and waited. When you were up front with the regiments and even into the battalion, especially when you were attacking, you were very busy doing two things. Sending messages, there weren't too many messages received, because the other people weren't going to contact you unless they had to, because they knew that you had to move, but we had to send messages and, as soon as we sent a message, we'd have to clear out of there, because the enemy would triangulate the position, and then, pretty soon, the field artillery would start coming in.

KP: That was why there was such an emphasis on mobility.

RB: That's right.

KP: You sent a message and you packed up.

RB: That's right, and, if we were anywhere near the infantry people, we'd send a message, they'd say, "Get out of here. Leave us alone." They didn't want anything to do with us. So, as a result, it was a unit, a three-quarter-ton truck, with the equipment in the back, three people manning it, the Sergeant and the other two people, usually they're both corporals. I was one of the corporals, but, anyway, at night, for example, we had to find shelter on our own. If we were in a town that had been shattered to kingdom come and there was nothing but half a building here and a cellar there, we would have to go and stay by ourselves that night, not with the other people, not with the infantry.

KP: In other words, you were isolated.

RB: Very much so.

KP: You even mentioned, later in the war, lines were very fluid; you could run into a unit and get captured or killed.

RB: That's right, but, still, we had to be in contact with the commander of the battalion or the regiment, whichever, whoever we were with, because he's the one that wanted to send the messages. So, he had to know where we were.

KP: You were not with him.

RB: No, no, not with him at all.

KP: Which is different from division and rear echelon, where you are part of the larger group.

RB: That's right, yes, and, in a division, sometimes, they would be able to just sit around and listen to the radio, the music coming in from England, for example, around Christmastime, Christmas carols and everything. We never got a chance to listen to anything. [laughter]

KP: While it is not as comfortable as in the States, the creature comforts were more comfortable in rear echelon and division. In other words, you got hot meals.

RB: Yes, oh, yes.

KP: You could change clothing occasionally.

RB: Well, not too much of that, but hot meals at least, yes.

KP: What about showers?

RB: Occasionally, but not very much.

KP: Even in division or rear echelon?

RB: Not that much.

KP: You could not just take a shower.

RB: No, no. The units would come in, the shower units. They were mobile, too.

KP: Yes.

RB: And, when you did get back, if you got a furlough, a pass from the front, before you got a chance to go into town or somewhere to relax, you had to be deloused, not only a shower, but

deloused first, and then, take your shower, because of where you'd been. I mean, you can't help but have lice if you're in a foxhole and you don't change your clothes for weeks at a time. [laughter] It gets pretty bad.

KP: What about when you were on your own? Since you were such a small unit, constantly on the move, you must have eaten K rations almost all the time.

RB: Yes, a lot, a lot, and C rations, more C than K, the better. Once in a while, we'd get a hot meal, but not that often.

KP: It sounds like you had to do a lot of scrounging if you wanted a hot meal.

RB: No, if we were close enough, oh, no, the mess sergeants would be happy to give us a hot meal, if we were there, when they were dishing it out, yes.

KP: However, you had to look for the mess.

RB: That's right. We weren't there.

KP: In other words, you really had to take care of yourself. Someone was not going to take care of you, like in other units.

RB: That's right, exactly.

KP: You were rear echelon in Belgium, and then, division for the Holland Campaign, and then, you were on the frontlines.

RB: Not really the frontline, but as close as you can get and still be in …

KP: … As close as you can get, for the Signal Corps, for the Bulge.

RB: Yes.

KP: On the front line, you were very much under fire. Were you under artillery fire at division?

RB: Division, I think they had more of a chance to be under artillery fire than we, because we were too close. When you're that close to the front line, you're going to get fire, small arms fire, and you're going to get other types of [fire], but not so much the …

KP: Artillery.

RB: The artillery, because that has a wider range. It goes farther back.

KP: In division, you would come under artillery attack. Do you remember?

RB: Yes, I don't remember when I was with the division, I don't remember having come under artillery fire, but it would.

KP: There was the potential.

RB: There was always the potential of friendly-fire, because that happened, too.

KP: Did you ever witness friendly-fire?

RB: No, but I had one of my buddies, the one that lives up in [North Jersey], he was buried under a building. He was in the cellar--he was a radio operator--the cellar and the building was hit and all the rubble came through and he was buried under that and given up for dead, until somebody heard a voice from underneath it. [laughter] Somehow, they got him out and this was friendly-fire, unfortunately.

KP: On the regimental level, you were close to the frontlines, but not part of the line.

RB: Yes, we didn't have to fire unless we were fired at or unless, obviously, in self-defense, but it wasn't a question of, "Here's a rifle and you go out there and take [this objective]." No, we didn't do that.

KP: There was always the potential for close calls.

RB: Oh, yes, yes.

KP: What was the scariest part of the war?

RB: I guess, once, when we were under bombardment, and this was not artillery. As I said before, we usually didn't have artillery, because we were too close, but, this time, I guess, maybe I must have been with division then, because there was quite a bit of artillery bombardment coming in. This other chap and I, not the two guys that I was with--this must have been another time, because it was a different fellow by the name of (Thornberry?)--and he and I had to man the radio that night. We couldn't leave it to take shelter from the artillery, because the radio was active and it was open and we had to be there for some reason. So, I guess that was the most dangerous, the time when I was more concerned.

KP: When you were in this three-man unit, how often would the radio be open? Did it vary or was it constant?

RB: It was open all the time, but it wasn't sending all the time. It was available all the time.

KP: Sometimes, it was available, but the commanders did not use it. It was up to the commander.

RB: That's right.

KP: Sometimes, you could be on for twenty-four hours.

RB: Not that long, no, a few hours we could go without, or even overnight--although nighttime activity was more active, really, I guess, than the daytime, really, a lot of times.

KP: Your sleep was very irregular.

RB: Well, we would have to take turns, yes. It was irregular.

KP: Since you were not part of the command post, how would you get messages? Would there be messengers?

RB: Yes. The Signal Corps had also telephone communications, wired, and, if we weren't that far, we would get the message through the telephone, and then, send it wireless to the other regiment or the division headquarters.

KP: Since you were on your own, did you ever get lost? Did you ever lose contact with units?

RB: Yes, when we went into this warehouse where all the liquor was stored, we were kind of lost then. Otherwise, I don't think we would have found it. [laughter]

KP: You ended up finding a huge cache of liquor at one point, later in the war.

RB: Yes, that's right, yes, but we were way ahead. We were--by then, the war was nearly over--we were advancing quite a few miles a day. So, you get in that truck, you keep going and, before you know it, you don't know if you've gone beyond your infantry people or your tank people or where you are. That's what happened that particular time.

KP: Your division saw a good chunk of fighting during the Battle of the Bulge.

RB: We were on the fringe of it and we didn't get the brunt of it. We were on the fringe and, as a result, ours was pretty much of a defensive action, because we didn't want them to come into where we were, and they didn't want to come in to where we were. They wanted to go through the 106th [Infantry Division]. There were quite a few guys Rutgers guys in there, by the way, that I knew.

KP: Looking back, it is easy to trace the Battle of the Bulge, but, at the time, did you know where the Germans wanted to come in?

RB: No, not really.

KP: It sounds like, especially in your initial orders of where to report, you really did not.

RB: No, everything was mass confusion and alarm and concern. It was a bad situation.

KP: You were only a three-man unit.

RB: Well, I was, actually, not with a unit, because I was going to go on furlough.

KP: On furlough?

RB: Yes. So, then, I had to find my way back to the unit. I don't know how I found my way back to the unit, but I wanted to be with the other two guys, the three-man team. I didn't want to go to division headquarters, and then, be assigned to some other unit, because the three of us get together, so, you get attached to your unit. That was my unit.

KP: The three of you?

RB: That's right.

KP: You mention in your memoirs, which we know a lot about, concern over infiltrators. There must have been a lot of suspicion aimed at you, because you were a three-man unit.

RB: No, not so much; well, I guess there could have been. It all depends on how well you speak English and how you answer questions if you're interrogated. If you're at a point where there's a guard there and you want to pass through, you'd get asked certain questions and, if you can't answer them, then, there's suspicion. Generally, there wouldn't be.

KP: During the Bulge, how many times was your unit stopped? Do you remember?

RB: No, I don't remember.

KP: Was it more than once?

RB: Yes, it was more than once.

KP: I get a sense that the volume of messages picked up during the Battle of the Bulge, particularly in the early days of the battle.

RB: Not that many.

KP: In a given week of combat, what was the ebb-and-flow of your work?

RB: It depends on the time. It depends on the activity at the time, because, when we were on the Ruhr, we were there for, oh, two, three months, didn't move. So, there was very little activity, but, when we were advancing on our own, there was a lot of activity, a lot of coordinated activity. During the Bulge, we were retreating, not on our own, but in disarray. So, there wasn't that much. You didn't know where anybody was, so, there wasn't that much contact.

KP: In the initial stages of the Bulge, you were just in your vehicle, trying to move back.

RB: Well, we didn't know where we were--we were told not to move back, but stay, not to move forward, either, just try to keep what you have, the territory that you have now, keep that, but there was a lot of confusion. We knew things were bad.

KP: During the Bulge, did you have any contact with the Germans or were you back far enough that you did not run the risk?

RB: During the Bulge? Before the Bulge, we had some contact, but not during it.

KP: Your particular group?

RB: No, my particular group did not.

KP: It was not until after you started to move through Germany that you really started to see German soldiers face-to-face. They would be trying to surrender.

RB: And German civilians, too.

KP: Before then, you were behind the lines enough that you did not see the front lines, in a sense that you could not spot a German soldier trying to shoot at you.

RB: It depends. If you were in one of these block-by-block forays, where you're taking a town block-by-block, then, you can. Then, you did, because you didn't know where the frontlines--there were no frontlines.

KP: How often would you shoot your weapon?

RB: Only in self-defense. I don't think I ever shot--yes, I shot mine once, yes.

KP: Do you remember the circumstances?

RB: No, I really don't remember. I just know that I had to clean the rifle that evening, because it had been fired. Once it's fired, you have to clean it. Otherwise, it'd get rusty.

KP: That is the only time you remember shooting it.

RB: That's the only time, that's right.

KP: Did you hit anything or anyone?

RB: I don't know. I hope I didn't. I wasn't aiming at any specific target.

KP: What about the other men in your group?

RB: No, the three of us did not have to fire.

KP: Although you were part of the frontline, infantrymen did not want you there because you attracted fire, because of the triangulation. It sounds like they viewed you as something of a rear echelon person, even though, at this point, you were not.

RB: No, not really, no. Anybody who was that close …

KP: That was not an issue.

RB: Was a buddy, yes.

KP: Whereas in division and rear echelon, you were in the rear.

RB: Yes, the infantrymen guys weren't really there. They were around, but farther off.

KP: Once you made it to this unit, you were really a part of the frontlines.

RB: Yes, pretty close, yes.

KP: However, there was still some tension between the two. You mention in the memoirs, you decided you were going to take the liquor you could carry and not share it with the infantry.

RB: Well, because there was too many of them. We wouldn't have been able to share it with them. Yes, that's true.

KP: It sounds like your experience on the frontline gave you a real appreciation for how tough the infantryman's life was.

RB: Oh, sure.

KP: Does anything stick in your mind about things that you might have theoretically understood, from reading about it, but now having seen it?

RB: Having experienced it, actually, because I think the worst is the mental exhaustion, the mental deterioration of a person when you're under that amount of stress. It's the stress, plus, the filth, plus, the death around you, plus, the need to go forward, even though your body tells you, "Don't do that," this is what's bad. I think there were just as many people--they don't use the term "shell-shocked" anymore--but I think there's just as many GIs that were casualties, mental casualties, or perhaps even more, than there were physical casualties.

KP: Did you ever encounter any battle fatigue cases?

RB: I think I came rather close, but, no, I can't say that I …

KP: … Encountered anyone with battle fatigue?

RB: Oh, you mean to see battle fatigue?

KP: Yes.

RB: I don't know. I may have seen it without being able to detect it, when I was among some of those guys. It's hard to tell, because a fellow can crack just like that, all of a sudden. You can just hold it so long and, all of a sudden, you'll break down.

KP: It sounds like you found this life tough.

RB: Well, I did find it tough. I also found it, strangely enough, I found it exhilarating, because--I don't know how to explain it, but there's so much going on, and then, you get all excited. I guess like in a basketball game at the last minute, when you're trying to [score], I guess it's something like that, but it's also the age. When you're in your twenties and you're physically fit and you feel fine, your life is ahead of you, you think. You don't think, "Well, I'm going to get killed tomorrow." You may.

KP: Even though you were in combat.

RB: Yes, but you don't think that. "Maybe my buddy might, but I'm not;" this is the American psyche.

KP: One of the things that struck me about the Bulge, in addition to combat, it was particularly cold that winter.

RB: Oh, horribly cold. That was one of the worst winters on record, yes.

KP: What did you do to stay warm?

RB: Whatever you could. Even if we found shelter in a deserted building that was half knocked down or something, you still couldn't build a fire or anything. A lot of times, what we would do is go into deserted houses and get the mattresses and get blankets, and so forth, and use those to cover yourself up and try and stay warm, but it was terrible, extremely difficult.

KP: Running the radio in such cold climate, did you ever have a problem with the equipment?

RB: No.

KP: Did the equipment ever break down?

RB: No, not that I can recall.

KP: You never had a problem.

RB: Sometimes, we couldn't establish contact, but I don't think it was because of equipment breakdown. I don't know what it was due to, but it would happen.

KP: Did you ever drive the truck?

RB: Yes, but I preferred to be in the back. I think I was the better of the three when it came to operating the radio, because I'd had been …

KP: In the War Department.

RB: Yes, I'd been in the War Department, where you really had to be good at it. The other guys were good, but I don't think they had reached that level. I was happy back there anyway, because I was under cover, even if it was just a camouflaged canvas cover, [laughter] but, still, you're not going to see the stars. So, I felt safe there.

KP: Whereas the front of the truck was not covered.

RB: No, I think it was. I think it had a roof, but, on the sides, it wasn't. It was more open.

KP: You related in your memoirs a very tragic incident where someone in your unit was killed when he went to urinate. You were taking shelter.

RB: Yes. I didn't know him. He was part of the Signal Corps, but he wasn't a radio operator. He wasn't in the radio operator section.

KP: How did you end up staying in the same place?

RB: Well, we just found shelter in this--it was like a dungeon, but it wasn't, it was more like a cellar--and he was there. Somehow or other, he was there and we just greeted each other and stayed there together.

KP: It could have been you at that particular moment

RB: Oh, sure.

KP: Was that the first casualty you encountered that you knew? You had encountered bodies before.

RB: Yes, this was.

KP: You wrote about it and it sounds like it was impactful.

RB: Yes. Oh, I'll never forget that.

KP: You mentioned being on the Ruhr for months in a stationary line. Did it shock you how quickly the German resistance collapsed at a certain point?

RB: No. I was just happy that we could advance that fast.

KP: You were delighted to have mobility.

RB: Oh, yes, to get it over with.

KP: What struck you as the worse type of fighting? Was it the city fighting?

RB: Yes, block-by-block, because you don't know. Around the next corner, you might run into somebody, you have to use a bayonet, which nobody likes to do. So, that was the worst.

KP: It sounds like, in terms of what your unit was trying to do, that was when you were in the greatest danger, in the street fighting.

RB: Yes, I think so, even though we were in the truck. I mean, we didn't want to leave the--we couldn't leave--the radio equipment. So, it wasn't like the infantryman who is on foot going around the corner. We would be behind him around the corner, but still in the truck. So, that was a little different.

KP: You were very much tied to that truck, in a way an infantryman was not.

RB: Oh, sure, that's right. That was our livelihood.

KP: Did you ever worry that you were a very inviting target?

RB: Yes, that's why we had to move every time we sent.

KP: Yes, but, even so, you were very massive.

RB: No, a three-quarter-ton truck wasn't that massive.

KP: You note in your memoirs, very accurately, the Americans, by this point in the war, controlled the skies.

RB: Yes.

KP: It would have been a very inviting target if the Germans had had better airpower.

RB: Oh, absolutely.

KP: That was what I mean by an inviting target, besides triangulation.

RB: Oh, no doubt.

KP: You write in your memoirs, you had a close call.

RB: It was my fault, really.

KP: Partly by, in retrospect, foolishness, but what seemed a very innocent action; could you relate that story?

RB: Because I thought it was friendly-fire. I thought, "We owned the skies, so, this has to be our own plane."

KP: You waved to this pilot.

RB: Yes. How foolish can you be?

KP: You waved to the plane, a German Messerschmitt, that strafed you.

RB: That's right. Well, he went around and came back.

KP: Yes.

RB: Fortunately, he only shattered a few windows that were still intact. [laughter]

KP: That was pretty close.

RB: It was, but it wasn't scary. It was close, but it happened so fast, it really wasn't as scary as when you're waiting for the artillery to come in and the artillery is coming in all night long.

KP: In the truck, when you were running the radio, you were more frightened then.

RB: When the artillery barrage was coming in, yes.

KP: Whereas this close call with the Messerschmitt …

RB: Yes, it happened so fast, you didn't realize what was going on until afterwards. "What in the world did I do?" but it was over with.

KP: It sounds like your friend, your buddy, really saved your life by telling you to get down.

RB: Yes, he did, yes, he sure did.

KP: Once German resistance started to collapse in March and April, it became a problem, not so much advancing, but what to do with the German POWs.

RB: Yes.

KP: It sounds like you encountered a lot of civilians and POWs.

RB: Yes.

KP: You just told them to keep going back.

RB: That's right.

KP: Including this soldier you encountered …

RB: That came to the house. [laughter]

KP: He came to the house and, in fact, was in the cellar.

RB: No, he was in the living room.

KP: He was in the living room.

RB: Yes. I don't know how it happened, because one of us was supposed to be on guard. The other two were upstairs in the bedrooms and nobody was supposed to be in the living room, but this German soldier, all of a sudden--that was kind of scary, simply because you don't expect to find a German soldier where you are, sharing your quarters, but he was more scared than we were--just as scared, I guess--a young kid only, couldn't have been more than eighteen, seventeen.

KP: You comment, which a lot of people did, with a little irony, that you did not find any Nazis and that the civilians wanted to put up their hands.

RB: Oh, we found plenty of Nazis--they just wouldn't admit they were Nazis.

KP: Yes, you were very suspicious.

RB: Oh, absolutely. They were all Nazis, but nobody would say, "*Me Nazi*," no, "*Me nicht Nazi*," that was it, "*Me nicht Nazi*."

KP: What did you think of the Germans? As you were advancing, you got to see them. Before, they were this distant enemy that shelled you.

RB: They're bigger than life when you imagined what they're going to be, but, when you're with them and among them, well, they're just people like anybody else. I think that's usually what it is when you have to meet the enemy and you haven't met the enemy yet. He's bigger than life.

KP: Then, when you were capturing them or driving through the towns, they became …

RB: In a way, it's pitiful. Some of them, I mean, it was pitiful to see humanity in such shambles.

KP: You mention in your memoirs that elements of your division liberated the Nordhausen camp. [Editor's Note: The 104th Infantry Division overran Nordhausen and the Dora-Mittlebau Concentration Camp on April 11, 1945.]

RB: Yes.

KP: Before the liberation of this camp, did you know that such atrocities existed?

RB: Never, not even afterwards, because I wasn't with that part of the division that went through, that went into it, to find the bodies. So, even afterwards, when I heard about it, I was shocked, I mean, "That can't be. That sort of thing doesn't exist."

KP: When did you realize the full extent of it?

RB: It wasn't until after the war.

KP: When you got back to the States?

RB: That's right.

KP: How did you hear about Nordhausen? Did you get radio traffic about it?

RB: Oh, from the guys on the way back on the ship. There was a lot of gambling going on, but there was also a lot of talk, a lot of reminiscing about what they'd seen and, obviously, I believed them, because they saw it.

KP: It was really not until the voyage home and back in the States, when you got to see pictures, that you fully realized what Nordhausen was.

RB: That's right. Well, I realized it on the way back, but I didn't realize the enormity of it until I got back here and saw pictures of it.

KP: At this stage of the war, you could often take as much ground as you could drive or walk in a given day, but your division would see some really hard fighting towards the end of the war.

RB: There always was the element of danger, because the Germans wouldn't give up easily, especially the *SS* and the stormtroopers. So, even if they're in disarray, they're fighting all the way back.

KP: As you were moving quickly, how often would you see combat?

RB: I don't think we would see that much, because we would be behind the tanks and the tanks and the artillery were together. Sometimes, the artillery would even get a ride on the tanks, but we would be behind them, and so, by the time we saw the Germans, they were already like this, [with their hands up].

KP: Yes. At Halle, your unit would really see heavy fighting. This is very close to the end of the war. [Editor's Note: The 104th Infantry Division fought their way into Halle, Germany, from April 15 to 19, 1945.]

RB: Yes.

KP: From your memory of it, it was very tough and unexpected

RB: Oh, yes. Nobody would believe that at that point in the war, it could be that, I mean, that they could be that strong and they had the spirit of fighting still in them. This was because of the *SS*. The *Wehrmacht*, the regular Army, they'd just as soon quit as say good morning, but they were forced. So, they really had no choice.

KP: At what point in the war did you know the distinction between the *SS* and *Wehrmacht*, or did it not matter to you?

RB: Not really, no, it didn't matter. Germans were Germans; Kraut, we called them a Kraut. [laughter]

KP: At Halle, did you know at the time why the resistance was so tough?

RB: We didn't know.

KP: It was only later that you learned that.

RB: That's right. We couldn't believe that they could be that tough. I mean, it was supposed to be a "cake walk;" no way.

KP: Did you have any personal contact with the Soviets?

RB: No, not personal, but our division did.

KP: Yes, but you never met any.

RB: No.

KP: Was it clear to you at the time that a lot of Germans were fleeing to avoid the Russians?

RB: German civilians, yes. Oh, that was very evident. German soldiers, no, they didn't have a choice. They'd get killed one way or the other. No, the civilians were very much afraid of the Russians, of the Soviets, and all they wanted to do was flee toward the American lines, because they knew that we were humane.

KP: Command had issued a non-fraternization order in relation to the German civilians. How strictly was that adhered to? You alluded in the memoirs that that gradually broke down.

RB: Well, it didn't break down, but nobody paid too much attention to it anymore, because there were so many Germans there. They didn't have that much food and we had quite a bit of food. The mess halls were still working full-time and it was easy for a GI to take seconds and not eat the seconds, but give it to some good-looking babe. So, that was easy.

KP: Was there any dating between German civilians and troops in your unit?

RB: There was, but covert.

KP: It sounds like very covert.

RB: Oh, yes, but there was.

KP: Before I ask you about what happened after V-E Day, is there anything about your experiences in Europe that I forgot to ask you about?

RB: There was one incident that you didn't ask about and that was about my buddy, Joe Pfaff.

KP: Who ended up getting a battlefield promotion.

RB: Yes, and was killed, yes. I met him at Camp Carson. He was from a different ASTP unit and I didn't know him until he got to Camp Carson. He was a kid that had been through--he was a Northwestern University student. He was an under[graduate] student; he hadn't graduated when he was--I don't know whether he was drafted or he volunteered. Anyway, he was on the skiing team and he was a very good skier and a very sharp guy, lots of fun and full of life, but he [was] also kind of one of these wise guys, superior. He felt superior mentally to some of these guys that had been through the mill with the division, some of these ordinary [soldiers], not a whiz mentality, but the ordinary mentality, and maybe he was right, I don't know, but it was not good, because, then, he wasn't able to stay with the division. He got too wise and I told him, "Hey, knock it off. Even if the guy's a dummy, but treat him with respect. He's a sergeant," or whatever he was. "Well," he'd say, "I'm not going to listen to them. They don't know what the hell they're talking about," that sort of thing. So, anyway, he was sent back to the infantry and I never saw him again, but I did hear, when I was overseas, that one of the fellows in our division that drove a jeep to carry officers around--I don't know what he did--but, anyway, he found out that Joe Pfaff had been there, spearheading a charge of a platoon and that he had done such a marvelous job that he got a battlefield commission, right then and there. It didn't surprise me, because the guy had it in him, but I also found out later on that he had been killed, because, in an advance, he had been caught in crossfire and his body was just cut in half, which is a terrible thing, but I'll never forget Joe Pfaff.

KP: You talked about him quite a bit. He left quite an impression.

RB: Well, because you remember him as he was, not as he would be today, an old man, like the rest of us, but you remember him as he was, basically, as he was, and that's what you have to do when you lose somebody at that age. That's how I remember him.

KP: In some ways, you were fortunate that, in your little group, none of you got harmed by the war.

RB: That's right.

KP: If you had been in a line company …

RB: Oh, they changed their personnel just about every week, casualties all the time, killed or wounded. No, the whole division, the whole Signal Corps, sorry, the signal company in the division, my signal, the 104th Signal, we only lost, I think, three or four men, out of the whole signal [company], and it's amazing, because so many of us were so close to the front and everything, but we didn't have that many casualties. It's wonderful. Of course, it also helped the fact that we were not in the way of the advance of the Battle of the Bulge. If we had been where the 106th was …

KP: Yes, it would have been very different. After V-E Day, did you know you were going to Japan or were you hoping you would be part of the Army of Occupation? [Editor's Note: V-E Day was declared on May 8, 1945.]

RB: No, we were not going to be part of the Army of Occupation.

KP: That was clear.

RB: That was clear. We were going to the Far East and participate in the invasion of Japan. There was no question about that.

KP: It was clear you did not have enough points.

RB: No; oh, just to even think about it was crucial. All we wanted to think about was our furlough and be with our wives and be back in the States and don't think about the future. Fortunately, while we were on furlough, the atomic bomb was launched and that was it. [Editor's Note: Hiroshima was the target of the first atomic raid on August 6, 1945. Nagasaki was attacked on August 9, 1945. V-J Day was declared on August 14, 1945, in the United States and August 15, 1945, in the Pacific.]

KP: You had a much more pleasant voyage home.

RB: Oh, sure.

KP: Was it a different type of ship?

RB: I don't know that it was different, but there was not that many of us. We weren't cramped together and we were hilarious, I mean, hilariously happy. So, no, there was time for crap games and everything. There was space, so, it wasn't that crowded.

KP: You won.

RB: Yes, I did, first time in my life.

KP: You won three hundred dollars. At that time, it was a princely sum.

RB: That's right.

KP: You stopped while you were winning.

RB: That's right.

KP: How often did you and Doris write to each other?

RB: Oh, I guess she must have written every day.

KP: Yes. How often were you able to write her?

RB: Oh, as often as possible. I would say a couple of times a week at least.

KP: Did any of your correspondence survive?

RB: I don't think so.

KP: You landed in New York Harbor. It sounds like you had something of a homecoming.

RB: Oh, yes, absolutely. There were bands there and everything. There were people waving flags and girls saying, "Come, welcome home GIs," and all that sort of thing. It was a tremendous welcome.

KP: Where did Doris and you meet?

RB: Well, at Kilmer.

KP: At Kilmer. She came out.

RB: Yes, she came to Kilmer and I was able to go and be with her and see her.

KP: Then, you really had more of a real honeymoon. You had your furlough and you could go and get away.

RB: Yes, that's right. Yes, we went up to New York State.

KP: How did you get up there, since rationing was still in effect?

RB: No, this was, I think, partly by train and partly by bus.

KP: It was there that you learned about the atomic bomb.

RB: Yes, that's right.

KP: Your furlough ended …

RB: On a happy note. [laughter]

KP: On a happy note, but you still thought you might be going overseas to the Far East.

RB: Well, I didn't know what was going to happen. We were hopeful that the war would end there, too, but there was no certainty of that. Until the atomic bomb was launched there, everybody assumed that there would have to be an invasion of the Japanese Islands.

KP: After you learned the atomic bomb was dropped, you still got sent out to California.

RB: Yes, because you can't change the orders that fast and we were going to go out there. We were still going to be sent to Japan, perhaps as an occupation or something, but MacArthur is the one that said, "I want no more combat troops out here." So, that was it, because ours was a combat division. Other people were still sent.

KP: By being in a combat division, in this case …

RB: We were able to be one of the first divisions to be deactivated, because we were here.

KP: Yes, in fact, there was a certain irony, because you were destined for Japan, but, by being destined for Japan, you got to go home earlier than a lot of occupation troops.

RB: That's right.

KP: It sounds like you were delighted to get out of the Army in November.

RB: Oh, yes.

KP: November of 1945.

RB: Yes. In a way, I'm sorry that I didn't keep my uniform, at least as a memento or something, and some of my ribbons. I didn't want to have anything to do with it. I just got rid of everything, boots, combat boots, the rest of it.

KP: When you got the pitch to re-enlist, you were not swayed.

RB: No, I wasn't about to.

KP: Where were you separated formally?

RB: Right there in California.

KP: In California. Did you get rail fare back to the East?

RB: I don't remember; I think I did. I don't remember, because I was inducted there. So, then, I may not have gotten money. Usually, if you're inducted and discharged at the same place, there's no rail fare due.

KP: You faced a choice after getting let out of the military between going back to school or working for J&J.

RB: Yes.

KP: Why J&J?

RB: Because they were that close and, when I was at Rutgers, I saw J&J and I had learned a little about what J&J was. I knew, I remembered, the name, because I remembered that my mother had always used Johnson's Baby Powder on all the kids. To me, Johnson's is historical and to be that close and to know that they had a worldwide operation and to know that I had something to contribute, because I could speak Spanish, and besides speaking Spanish, which is just one element of it, I was a good salesman, at least I thought I was, all these things you put together. I built myself up mentally as a qualified candidate for the kind of position that I hoped to get.

KP: Being in New Brunswick, in addition to meeting your wife, you found the company you had wanted to work for.

RB: That's right, which I never would have had I not been in New Jersey.

KP: Yes. How did you get your job with J&J? How did you make contact with them? You obviously thought of yourself as an excellent candidate. How did you convince J&J?

RB: Well, because, first of all, I applied for a job in J&J International--not just J&J, but J&J International--and I got a job, but it was a clerical job and that's not what I wanted. I told them I wanted an overseas job, but they said, "Well, I don't know if there's any such thing available, but we'll see." It wasn't until I got my vacation time; I guess I had been there six months or so and it was time for a vacation. I got two weeks' vacation and, instead of going to the Shore, like most people were doing, I commuted to New York City, to Wall Street, where J&J International had its headquarters, where the top management of J&J International worked. I commuted there every day and I went to J&J and I told the secretary, or whoever was there, the receptionist, that I …

----------END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO----------

KP: You would talk to the receptionist, saying that you wanted to talk to the Vice President.

RB: And they said, "Well, oh, he's not in today." "Well, okay, then, I'll come back later. I'll come back tomorrow," or, "He's tied up. He's busy." "Well, I'll wait." "You can wait if you want, but I don't think he's going to have time." So, finally, I guess after about the fourth or fifth day, it was already getting toward the end of the week, or maybe it was the second week, I don't

remember, but, anyway, finally, I guess they felt sorry for me or they got tired of seeing my face. So, they told the Vice President, unbeknownst to me, "There's some young fellow that keeps coming in and he wants to see you. He works for …

KP: The New Brunswick office.

RB: So, he says, "Well, all right, let him come in. I'll talk to him." So, I went in and he said, "What can I do for you?" and I said, "Well, it's really what I think I can do for you. This is what I'd like. I'm very anxious to stay with the company. I'm a good salesman, and I think I am, and I'd like to be representing this company, you. I'd like to represent you overseas, especially in Latin America, in a sales or marketing capacity," and, well, then, he wanted to know, "Who are you? Where do you come from?" all the history that you've asked me, and so, he said, "Well, thanks for coming in." I said, "You're welcome," and I left. I figured, "Well, that's it, 'Thanks for coming in.'" So, after the vacation was over, I went back to work and it was about a month later that my boss in New Brunswick, the office manager, called me in. He says, "Mr. (Abeo?) called." That was the Vice President. "There's a fellow from Peru, the son of our distributor there. He's a young man and he doesn't speak English. He's coming up to New York on vacation and Mr. (Abeo?) would like to know if you would be interested in being with him and translating for him, just spend your days, instead of here in the office, with him while he's here." I said, "Oh, I'd be delighted," and I did. His name was (Jean D'Vienbenue?). He was of French decent, but he didn't speak English, and so, we got along good in Spanish and I was with him during all the time that he was here, a week-and-a-half or so. I liked being out of the office. I liked being in New York City.

KP: It sounds like it was nice.

RB: All expenses paid and everything. So, I had a good time, and then, Jean went back and I went back to work, and then, a little bit after that, Mr. (Abeo?) wanted to see me. Actually, he came down here. He used to come once a week to New Brunswick, so, I'd seen his face, but it wasn't until I met him in New York that I got a chance to talk to him, but he came down and he wanted to know, "I understand you're interested in going overseas," and I said, "Yes." He says, "There may be an opening in Peru. The salesman we have in Chile is going to be promoted to the Philippines," we're just opening up the Philippines after the war, "and our fellow in Peru is going to Chile and that leaves Peru open." It was the smaller of the three markets, so, that's the reason why that one would be opened, "And I wondered if you might be interested in going down there for us and trying it out. You seem to be anxious to do that," and I said, "I'm delighted." He says, "Do you want to speak to your wife about it?" and I said, "No. I'll say yes right now." [laughter] I didn't even ask what the salary was or anything. I just said yes, which was not the smart thing to do, but, anyway, it worked out okay. So, that's how I wound up in Peru.

KP: How did your wife take it when you came home?

RB: Well, she was in shock. She says, "I don't even know--I don't speak Spanish and I don't even know where Peru is, to tell you the truth. I know it's in South America somewhere." I said, "Well, you're going to find out and, besides," I said, "if we don't like it, we can always come

back. Don't worry about it, it'll be okay." So, to make a long story short, we wound up there and we stayed nine years. It was a three-year hitch with a vacation at the end of each hitch. So, at the end of the first three years, I wanted to go back, and then, she had already made a lot of friends there and started learning to speak Spanish and she had a little dog that she didn't want to leave and that sort of thing. So, she was willing to go back and we did that twice and, in the meantime, I got a chance to expand into--the Chile market didn't develop, so, the fellow was moved. We didn't have a man in Chile. I think he went to Venezuela, but, anyway, so, I was able to go from Peru to Chile on occasion and to Bolivia. So, I expanded my territory. Instead of just being the rep for Peru, I was in charge of the three countries, plus, the fact that we started local manufacturing operations, packaging, really. So, it changed from being the representative to being the local manager. So, I was there nine years and, at the end of the ninth year, we were both, Doris and I both, felt that maybe we should come back and establish roots. We were getting on into our thirties and we wanted to be here. Moreover, I was offered a transfer to Columbia, which was a bigger market, and I figured, "If I do that, I'll probably never get back." I mean, once you're an expatriate for X number of years, you either never get back or you don't want to get back, and so, it was a combination of those two things that we decided, "No, we're going to go back." We came back, back to New Brunswick for reassignment within J&J, if I wanted to stay with J&J. The possibilities that I had were two. One was to be with the Medical Devices Division and work for them in Mississippi, the other one was to stay with the Hospital Division, I didn't know where that was going to take me, or the third one was stay with the Consumer Products, baby products and Band-Aids and that sort of thing, with that division, which was my favorite anyway and that meant a territory in South Jersey. So, I took that one. I said, "Yes, that sounds good to me," and the division headquarters was in Philadelphia and I was able to establish my home anywhere in the territory from Atlantic City to Camden to Salem down south. So, I was told by the ex--the guy that was being promoted out of that territory into a bigger job--I was told to stay in close to Philadelphia, not to go to Atlantic City, which was my first initial reaction, that I should go there, because that's a seasonal job. I mean, in the winter, there's not that much doing there. "You're going to be spending too much time away from home around the Camden area and around the Philadelphia area, and all the division meetings are going to be in Philadelphia. So, you might as well stay here." So, I said, "That sounds like a good idea." So, we did rent an apartment down in Haddonfield, which we loved, Haddonfield. I was there for, I don't know, six months, eight months, something like that, and I was called in and I was asked if I wanted to be a sales trainer. I had done, apparently, a good job and a good salesman, so, they wanted to know if I wanted to be a sales trainer, in addition to my other job. So, I said, "Sure." So, I was indoctrinated into that in New Brunswick, and then, I went back and I was training people on the job. In other words, I was working my territory, but showing the trainee how to do it, where to go and what to do and what to say, and that worked for a few months, and then, I was asked if I'd like to be promoted to a food territory in the Great Lakes Division. This was called the Eastern Division; Great Lakes Division. Food territory was a bigger job because, at that time, the company was just starting to sell its goods in supermarkets. Up until then, it was all drugstores. So, I said, "Yes," anything for a promotion, more money, more prestige, more of everything. So, I said, "Fine." Of course, Doris wasn't happy about that, either, leaving New Jersey again, and we lived in a place called Avon Lake, which is right on Lake Erie, which was nice, but she didn't like it, because it was kind of out in a farm. It wasn't what she was used to and she didn't have any friends or anything and I was away most of the time, traveling.

KP: It sounds like it was a vast territory.

RB: Well, it wasn't that vast, but it was big, Cleveland to Akron to (Mansfield?), all that area of Ohio. It's a big part of Ohio; not all of Ohio, but a big part of Ohio. So, we were there until my vacation time came and, when that came, I wasn't really happy with it, because I didn't like my district manager. The district manager here, I liked very much, the one in Philadelphia. In fact, we still correspond. He's retired in San Diego now, but the other one was very ambitious and he didn't care how much he drove his men as long as he got a promotion. He used to tell us, "I'm going to be;" he was a division manager, he wanted to be a regional manager. He said, "I'm going to be a regional manager. I don't care how hard I work you guys," which is not exactly the way you "influence people," as Dale Carnegie used to say. So, anyway, I decided I didn't want to stay with them. I liked J&J, but I didn't want to stay on that job. So, when we got a vacation, we came back to New Jersey. Doris wanted to be with her sisters and I went to New York City looking for a different job and, through one of these placement agencies, I was able to get interviewed by a pharmaceutical company and I was offered the job, provided that I passed the physical. When I went back to Cleveland, I would have to meet their district manager and go to a doctor and pass a physical. If I passed the physical, then, the job was mine, which happened. So, then, I told the guy I didn't like that he could shove it. I told him, "That's it, I've got a new job. I'm leaving." This new job, new company, was willing to pay my moving expenses back and I started out as--my title was promotion manager. Sales, it was a combination of sales training manager and promotion manager. So, I don't know, you want me to keep going?

KP: Keep going.

RB: So, I was delighted, because I was going to be able to commute from New Jersey, where Doris wanted to live, and work in the office. Of course, it wasn't international. No, I'm sorry, it was international. Another reason I didn't like the domestic J&J, because I missed international so much, that's it. So, that's why I wanted to get back into international. So, when I got to the new company, it was the International Division of Ayerst Laboratories and Ayerst Laboratories was a division of American Home Products, still is, except that it's merged with Wyeth now.

KP: You would do quite well at your new company.

RB: Well, I started out as a promotion manager and sales training manager and it was good on both sides. It was good for me because I was going to be able to train salespeople; not really salespeople. In that company, they're called "detail men," because they detailed doctors, but they also sell to pharmacists. So, it's a combination of detailing, plus, salesmanship. I was able to train these people overseas, which means I would be able to travel, not only to South America, but, hopefully, other places and, for them, it was terrific, because they killed two birds with one stone. "Here's a sales trainer that can train people in South America in Spanish and train people in English in other parts of the world. So, we don't have to have two guys. All we need is one." So, it worked out well for both of us and, after I was there a year-and-a-half or so--it was a very different type of indoctrination, because I had to learn physiology. The company was strong in hormones and particularly female hormones, estrogen. So, in order to train the detail men, so [that] they would be able to speak intelligently to the doctors, they would have to know what

they're talking about. They would have to know how the human body works, the female particularly, fertilization of the egg and the menopause and the rest of it, everything that has to do with the female anatomy. So, I had to learn that from the ground up in order to be able to teach it to somebody, which I did, and I was delighted, because I was always interested in learning anyway. So, this way, I was able to get paid while I was enhancing my own intellect and my own knowledge, and then, I was able to go and teach it. My first job was in 1950--no, I transferred from J&J to Ayerst in '58. My first assignment overseas was in late '59, about a year later, and the assignment included--well, it was started by going from here to Spain and, in Spain, we didn't really have any distributor yet. So, my job was going to be expanded, because the company didn't have that many people. It was a small company. It was only three executives at that time, plus secretaries. Incidentally, I had my own secretary, which was the first time I ever really had a secretary. So, I had to check out some people that had written expressing interest and see if they were worthwhile to select as distributors. From Spain, I went to Italy, to Rome. We had a company there I wanted to meet. I was supposed to meet our manager in Rome. From Rome to South Africa via Khartoum, but the Khartoum in the Sudan was merely to refuel, for the plane to refuel, it was a stop en route, but the first assignment, training assignment, was in South Africa, in Johannesburg, in English, of course, which occurred and I made good friends there and we worked together. The doctors were delighted to meet an American. They hadn't met an American. They knew all about American medicine and everything. So, when we went into the doctor's office, it was more like a get-together, rather than, "Well, here's a product. Please use it," that sort of thing and that's how I learned the expression, "Spend a penny." That's the first time I'd ever seen female sales reps. We had male sales representatives and female. I was working that Monday--the training was in the classroom, but also in the field, with the individual--and I was with this female, this girl, lady, sales rep. Every time we went into the doctor's office, we would get offered tea, not coffee, but tea. In South Africa, rooibos is tea. So, after a while, you kind of get filled-up with tea. So, she asked me, "You want to spend a penny?" I didn't know what she was talking about. What she meant was, "Do you want to go to the john?" [laughter] Then, when she explained it, I said, "Yes, I would." She said, "Me, too." So, I don't know how we did it, we each went our separate ways, and then, we came back, but, anyway, that was the first training assignment. It went well, and then, my next assignment was Sydney, Australia, from Joburg to Sydney, and it was still on the DC-7, not the jet. The jets were not out yet. So, it had to make two stops. The first stop from Joburg was Mauritius and the second stop was in the Cocos Islands in the South Indian Ocean, south of India. It's a little island, a beautiful island, and all we did was stretch our legs there and we were there for a couple of hours, stretch our legs and walk along the beach, pick up seashells, and it was manned by just some Australians that was there for that purpose, for navigational purposes, for the ships, and so forth, Cocos Islands. Then, finally, we landed in Perth, on the west coast of Australia, and, from there, changed planes to a local, to a national airline that took me to Adelaide, and then, to Sydney. Sydney was the second class, the second session of teaching with the local reps, and that went well, too. From Sydney, I went to the Philippines, got there at six o'clock in the morning and the Filipino reps were all waiting at the airport, waiting to receive me, with a big sign, "Hi, Welcome Bob Bustamante." [laughter] Oh, they're great, the Filipinos. I still correspond with some of them, they're just great people, but, anyway, so, that was the end of the trip, and then, I came back, but I want to make a long story short. So, I was promoted to marketing manager and I was also given the assignment of finding managers, because we were developing companies in Puerto Rico. For example, we went from a distributor

to our own company, and then, I was in charge of establishing that company and it was the first company that had--first, it was the first overseas subsidiary that had ever made money the first year. Usually, it takes about five years to break even, and then, after the fifth year, the company starts making money, but, in the beginning, when you're first established, there's a loss to be expected, because of all of what is entailed in establishing a company, incorporation and the rest of it, but this company made money the first year. So, I felt good about it and I started to think, "Gee, that was great," but other people noticed, too. The second company that I was in charge of establishing was in the Philippines and, again, this company made money the first year. So, after that, I became a vice president. I mean, people recognized when things are going well. I became a vice president in charge of Asia and Australia, everything from Turkey to Japan, plus Australia and New Zealand, and I worked that for three or four years, and then, I was promoted to executive vice president in charge of those same companies--no, in charge of those same countries plus Mexico, which was a big marketplace. From there, when the President retired, I was promoted to the presidency in charge of the whole world for International and I was in charge of 1,800 people, worldwide, and I was there for four years, and then, I retired.

KP: Why did you retire?

RB: Because I was asked to take early retirement. I think that the company may have felt that I reached burnout. I'm not sure. I didn't think I'd reached burnout, but maybe they did and maybe I had. I don't really know.

KP: It sounds like you might not have retired if they had not suggested it, but you also did not mind retiring either.

RB: Yes, that's right, but, in any case, I had accomplished my mission. I had done the impossible. I mean, here's a kid that didn't finish college and he gets to do what--by the way, I had medical doctors under me, I had a lot of, well, most of the executives under me were college graduates, but there was a little bit of resentment, I think. I don't know if they knew I wasn't a college graduate or not, but, in any case, I was of Latin decent and that, right away …

KP: That was a source of tension.

RB: Not overtly.

KP: Not overtly, but you could sense …

RB: I don't know. Maybe I was just a bit conscious of it. I don't know; in some cases, among certain individuals, yes, among most, no.

KP: What about at J&J? Did you ever sense that that was a problem?

RB: No.

KP: No, that being of Latin decent …

RB: No, it helped me, because that's how I got to Latin America.

KP: Backing up to J&J, when you were in Peru, your wife really took to it, despite some initial reservation, and it seems like you enjoyed the job immensely.

RB: Oh, I loved it.

KP: You decided to come home because it was a crucial watershed, whether you come back or you live the expatriate life.

RB: Right.

KP: It seemed like you enjoyed the expatriate life quite a bit.

RB: I did.

KP: Parts of it, you enjoyed a great deal, but you also had some concerns about it.

RB: I guess my concern was basically Doris. If it hadn't been for Doris, I would have probably led the expatriate life, but she didn't want to. She said, "Look, I've been a good soldier up to now, but the time has come, enough is enough," and I felt that she was right.

KP: However, you liked a lot of the expatriate life.

RB: Oh, yes.

KP: What was it that you liked the most?

RB: Well, to begin with, in South America, the man is the boss. You become native. You start acting like them [laughter] and, to a male, that's great. I mean, to a female, probably not, because the female is delegated to something lesser, and that's how it is. That's how the society works down there and Japan, of course, is notorious for that, but maybe that's one reason why I kind of liked it so well, and not only that, I was my own boss, had my own hours. I could work whenever I wanted. Of course, I always worked, because I was a workaholic to begin with, but I didn't have to. I worked on Saturdays; people here didn't work on Saturdays. I worked on Saturdays because the distributor worked on Saturday and I figured, "Why should I stay home or why should I go play tennis when I can [work]?" They work half a day only on Saturdays. So, I worked half a day. In the afternoon, I'd go out and play tennis and the distributor was great, because they gave me my own office, it was not an individual office, but I had it partitioned off, and the use of a secretary and everything. So, that was nice and they were like family.

KP: Coming back to the States, it sounds like you lost a lot of your autonomy by coming back to the domestic division.

RB: Well …

KP: You still had a lot of independence, but you were not …

RB: You mean from a work standpoint?

KP: Yes.

RB: Oh, yes.

KP: When you were in Peru, you were it.

RB: I was, that's right.

KP: New Brunswick and New York is a long way away.

RB: That's right.

KP: You have got to keep them informed, whereas, here, they told you to live near Philadelphia. It seems like you were more structured.

RB: Oh, yes, oh, tiers upon tiers. This is totally different. I still had freedom, because I had my own territory, but, still, I had to report every day and write the orders every day, the orders I'd take, and that sort of thing, which I never did in South America--maybe a letter a week, or maybe every two weeks or something, and that's it.

KP: J&J was an older company when you were working for them. It already had quite a reputation. Did you get the sense that you wanted to leave because it was more bureaucratic?

RB: No, no, I loved that company. I still do.

KP: Yes, you think …

RB: Oh, I think it's great.

KP: It almost sounds like, if you had been in a better area, you might have stayed, if you had been in New York rather than the Great Lakes.

RB: Yes, I probably would have stayed, although after Great Lakes, I was told, after I left the company, that my next assignment was going to be a division managership, probably out West, but there was nothing specific. It hadn't been offered, but they were talking about it, unbeknownst to me. So, that's the way it probably would have gone, but too many moves and Doris didn't want to make that many moves. She said, "Look, I want to stay in New Jersey and that's it."

KP: Ayerst, in a sense, gave you that stability of working in New York.

RB: Yes.

KP: Even though you traveled, New York became the home base for the rest of your career.

RB: Yes, that's right.

KP: It sounds like it was very exciting, because, in a sense, you were building a company.

RB: Oh, extremely.

KP: You were setting things up. You were writing the rules, in a sense, for a while.

RB: That's right.

KP: While you got to know Peru and South American culture very well, you were later doing this training in South Africa and Asia. You got to know a lot about different cultures and people.

RB: That's right.

KP: Do you have any observations, from a business standpoint or just in general, that you gleaned from doing this?

RB: Well, I guess, from a business standpoint and from the standpoint of gaining recognition at the home office and being considered for promotions and going up the ladder, I think the basic thing was the knowledge of people, the screening of candidates and selecting the people that can do the job, because, if I hadn't selected the right manager in Puerto Rico and the Philippines, it would not have been successful that soon. We may have required a succession of managers and, in turn, by having the right people work for you, you're home free, because they do the job for you, but you have to know people. You have to treat people correctly and you have to deal with people in their own, considering their own backgrounds. When you're in the Philippines, you consider yourself a Filipino. You think in terms of a Filipino, not in terms of an American. You can't do that and there's so many different languages and so many different customs and so many different rituals that are part of all this. So, to be in international, you've got to pretty much be the chameleon and be what they are. In Japan, for example, I could never, ever have gotten done the job that I did if I didn't drink, because the first thing they do, after the ritual green tea, but, after hours, these guys drink like fish, I mean, and, if you don't drink, forget it. They don't want to even bother with you. So, that's another company I incorporated, the one in Japan, but that was after I was already a vice president.

KP: I do not know a lot about business history, but one of the impressions I get is that you were in the era when American business was expanding abroad and I can imagine that there were companies and managers that were much more arrogant and did not have the attitude of, say, being a Filipino when you are in the Philippines.

RB: Oh, absolutely.

KP: Did you know of cases where companies just flubbed it because of arrogance? It seems like you were a very adept observer of the seemingly innocuous customs that were very important.

RB: That's right. That's how I felt, exactly.

KP: Did you know of people who flubbed it, any that you can vaguely hint at?

RB: Well, I know of cases where there's a meeting, the Americans are having a meeting with Japanese and the Japanese bring in an interpreter. So, when the interpreter is out of the room, these Americans are hashing over how they're going to approach the next offer and what are they going to say to them and how far can you go to offer? The guy is sitting there, he knows English very well, but he's the boss. He never speaks English and brings a translator and all he does is sit there and listen. The other guys think, "This stupid guy doesn't speak English, doesn't know anything, so, we can say anything we want." See, this sort of thing you have to be very wary of. Nowadays, it doesn't happen as much, because most Japanese speak English, but, twenty years ago, they didn't.

KP: Yes. This incident, did you know the people involved in that?

RB: Yes, it was a fellow from Upjohn Laboratories.

KP: Yes, you do not have to give him up. You were coming in contact, particularly when you had all of Asia, with many different cultures. Were there mistakes that you made? What were some of the subtleties that you picked up? You alluded to, for example, drinking is important to Japanese executives. What were the things that surprised you that you learned or mistakes that you made? What were some of the subtleties that you learned that you are particularly proud of or goofs that you made?

RB: Well, let's see, I'm trying to think--it's not that I didn't make blunders or goofs. I'm sure I made plenty. I'm trying to think of one that was critical.

KP: Or even not so critical, because there are so many things to learn about.

RB: Oh, one thing, one blunder that I did make, at a Japanese meeting of Japanese executives, our distributor there brought in all their executives for it, like we used to do it for sales meetings, but, then, came the parties, the partying afterwards, and, one time, I drank too much sake and I got sick as a dog. That was a blunder, because everybody knew that I'd gotten sick--so, kind of a little "lost face" type of thing. So, I learned--just because it's sake and it's not strong, you don't drink it like soda. [laughter] One thing I remember, when I was in Pakistan, I had a chance to go, let's see, from Lahore to Peshawar and there was a movie that was made called *Lives of the Bengal Lancer* [(1935)]. It was many years ago, Gary Cooper had made it, and this was on the--I'm trying to think of the trail. Well, it's not going to make a story, because I can't think of the fort, the name of the fortress, but, anyway, it went from Pakistan into Afghanistan, into North Afghanistan. I had seen the movie and I'd seen the fortress, at least depicted in Hollywood probably, but I was glad to--the Khyber Pass, that's what it was, the Khyber Pass, famous in Kipling's stories. That was nice, to see that; well, look, let me show you something.

KP: I saw your pictures, yes.

RB: I'm not a photographer, but, with my camera, I took pictures, these are enlargements, of places that I've been that I liked. I have more, but these are the ones that I could put there. This is Hagia Sophia in Istanbul. This is The Little Mermaid [sculpture, based on] Hans Christian Anderson's *Little Mermaid*, in Copenhagen; Korea, a temple in Korea. This is the famous Buddha in Japan, in Kamakura. Spain, it's Madrid, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza [statues in the Plaza de Espana]. You familiar with the work *Don Quixote*?

KP: Yes.

RB: In Australia, they call him "Don Quick-sent." [laughter] Anyway, that's Don Quixote and here again is the same Don Quixote about ten years later, ten or fifteen years later, the same Don Quixote and Sancho Panza from a different angle, but already built up in the back, so [that] you don't see the beauty of it as you do here, and that's what happens with the cities. I mean, they get built up and built up and, pretty soon, you don't see the landscape. So, anyway, while you were here, I just remembered that.

KP: Yes, I noticed that. Connecting something with World War II, you had a lot of dealings in Japan and, in fact, you had created a subsidiary there. Was that a strange feeling? These had once been the feared enemy that had attacked the United States. What were your thoughts? It must have changed.

RB: The first, my first trip to Japan, and I had never met the Japanese, when we were flying over Japan, over Tokyo, we'd gotten to Tokyo to land, I looked down and I just couldn't believe it. I said, "How is it possible that just a few short years ago, two or three, I was going to be part of an invasion force and, here I am, flying over Tokyo in peacetime, going to meet people with whom I'm going to be doing business with?" It's hard to fathom, but it happened and the Japanese are very difficult people to get to know intimately. In fact, you really don't. First of all, they're so different from America. They do everything just the opposite. Even the names of the women, they don't end with an "A," they end with an "O." So, anyway, I got to meet these people and it took quite a number of trips to Japan to actually get to know them a little more intimately, in terms of the name, for example. You always call them--you never use the first name, that's never used. That's only for identification purposes and their last name is always used, with a "san" after it, like, Yoshito-san, Takanawa-san. After you get more friendly with them and you've been through several drinking bouts with them, and geisha parties, because they always have a geisha party and everybody performs at the geisha party--everybody has to sing or do something, including the guests, and the more loaded they get, the more they do that. Anyway, then, you get to instead of Yoshito-san, you can reduce the name to Yo--let's see, how was it?--Yoshi-san or Yo-sa, something. It became diminutive. Somehow, their last name becomes diminutive. When you can use the diminutive term for the Japanese, he's much more than just a business associate, he's your friend, although you never get to go to their home, never used to at least. The reason for that is that no matter how forward they are in their international business, at home, they don't--they didn't--have inside plumbing half the time in their homes and their homes are just little bitty things and their paper walls and that sort of thing. They were

ashamed. It's not that they didn't want you to go to their home, they were ashamed of it. Besides, they didn't want you to meet their wives, because the wife is not important.

KP: In other cultures, it was very different.

RB: Totally, totally, but, there, the wife is unimportant. So, if you ever brought your wife--I never brought my wife, but people that did, some Americans executives that didn't know any better--it was a hardship on the Japanese. They didn't know what to do with her and they would invite her, but she's in the way. It's a man's world, "Geisha house is no place for woman," I mean, invited women. The women there, yes, and the geisha houses, by the way, are not whorehouses. These women do not sleep except with their mentor, the one that placed them there, the one that gave them the education to be a geisha and he's usually a big shot businessman, but she's his concubine and that's it. So, you have to learn a lot of things. Another thing that you have to know is, when you go into a bath, they're usually not--men and women are not together, usually, I've never been to one but with men, yes--but even there, when you soap yourself, you wash that soap off before you dive in. You don't dive in with it, and some Americans have done that and ruined the whole tub and everything. These are the things you have to learn.

KP: It sounds like you have a lot of respect for the Japanese and for their abilities in business.

RB: Oh, yes, I do. I have a lot of respect for them, because they are decent people, they are honest people. They are people of their word. Once they give you their word they're going to do something, they do it; not so with the Chinese, oh, devious as hell. They'll tell you one thing and do another and forget it. They say, "No, I didn't say that." No, the Japanese would never be like that.

KP: You had a long time to get to know them and get on friendly terms, but, once you developed a comradeship, that could be very enduring. You could really rely on someone once you had broken that barrier.

RB: That's right, and the manager that we had in Japan, who died recently, I was in contact with him until very recent when he died. Anyway, he was in Hiroshima. By the way, it's not pronounced "Hiro-shima." It's "Hi-ro-shima." The Japanese language does not have a dip before the last vowel, like we say, "Hiro-shima," or "Yo-shi-no;" no, it's all on the same, "Hi-ro-shima," Yo-shino;" strange, but that's how they speak.

KP: Did he ever tell you what that experience was like?

RB: He did. I don't know how he ever survived, but he says that he was in a barracks. He was a young lieutenant in the Army and he said he was in the barracks and they were cleaning house and they had all the mattresses in this big barracks hall in a pile. Somehow, he was underneath there or he was pushed underneath there by the blast, because, by the time he came to and he came out there, there was nothing left and he survived, although he had burns and everything. He was told, years afterward, he was told when he got married, he was told that he should not have children, they should not have children, he and his wife, because of the danger of

mutations, and so forth. He said, "I agree, I don't want any children," but his wife didn't agree, didn't tell him. She just said yes, but she meant no. So, well, before he knew it, she was pregnant. To make a long story short again, they have two children, which were normal, thankfully.

KP: He was very lucky.

RB: He was lucky, but he did have a lot of problems with anemia, although he didn't look anemic. He was on the heavyset side. He had heart problems and palpitations, all sorts of things. He learned English, by the way, from the Army of Occupation, by the Americans, and that's how he got the job with us, because he knew English well enough.

KP: From the Army of Occupation?

RB: Yes.

KP: In Japan and elsewhere, you were dealing with people of your generation who had been through World War II, on the same and different sides. Did that thought ever run through your mind? In this case, this executive had been in Hiroshima, he had been a young lieutenant.

RB: Oh, well, we talked about it. Oh, yes, in fact, the owner of the company that represented us there, he had been with the Japanese Army in Manchuria and he was taken prisoner. I forget what it was, but, anyway, during our discussions, again, at a geisha house we're talking about, he said, "I don't know whatever gave us, whatever gave Japan, the idea that we could beat the US. I mean, it's stupid," he said, but, at that time, it wasn't.

----------END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE TWO----------

KP: This continues an interview with Mr. Robert Bustamante on June 11, 1996, in Metuchen, New Jersey, with Kurt Piehler. You were saying that this executive said to you that he realized that it was foolish of the Japanese to think that they could win the war.

RB: Oh, yes, that's what he said. He couldn't understand why they would do that, but, of course, they always have the tendency to think of themselves as small compared to the US. They always wanted to have special treatment, special discounts, and so forth, because, after all, Japan is small, the US is so big. All of a sudden, they practically overtook us, but, still, they would say, "We're still small," [laughter] but no matter how important they've been internationally and how the whole world has looked upon them as being, in certain ways, in banking, for example, the number one country, still, they always consider themselves inferior to the US--not racially or anything, inferior in terms of what we have here. This is a huge country, we have so much freedom, we have huge houses. To them, this would be a mansion, and a big yard in the back and everything. They don't know anything about things like that. So, even though the country has the name Japan--Japan, Inc., is huge--individually, the Japanese doesn't consider himself [that way].

KP: You developed that sense from having so many dealings in Japan, that even a very well-off executive, by comparable American standards, you just led a better life than them.

RB: Oh, no doubt.

KP: You were in Asia, in charge of Asian operations, during the Vietnam War. What were your thoughts at the time about Vietnam?

RB: I guess ambiguous, I guess that's the only word I can use. I certainly did not agree with the antiwar people here, simply because I was trained to be an American, to fight for my country no matter what. So, it never occurred to me to say, "No, I'm not going to do this," or, "I don't feel like doing it." So, from that point of view, I certainly wasn't in favor of what the country was doing in Vietnam. On the other hand, when you realize that there was really no need for us to be there, then, you start to wonder, and it's easy to second guess.

KP: Among the various people you came in contact with in the various countries, what did they think of the war?

RB: Not too much mention was made of it, to tell you the truth.

KP: It almost sounds like a conversation you avoided having.

RB: Yes, yes, we did. Although, once, when I was in Taiwan, Doris' nephew, one of Doris' nephews was in Vietnam and he got a furlough to go to Taipei, and so, we met there and we had a good night of it together, but, then, he had to go back to Vietnam.

KP: Which must have seemed odd, as a soldier. You had been a soldier yourself and the idea of flying on leave to another country, did that seem strange to you?

RB: Yes, totally, totally out of character. [laughter]

KP: That would have been like, for you, when you were in Germany, to fly to England for a few days of furlough.

RB: That's right.

KP: Did you ever have any dealings with the American government while you were overseas in any of the places? Were you ever tapped by the CIA? Did you ever need the American Consul?

RB: I had as little as possible to do with the American Consul. Actually, Peru was the only place and that was because I was very active with the American Legion and, on Fourth of July, days like that, when you had special [events], all the people from the Embassy would be there and I would be involved.

KP: When did you join the Legion? Was it right after you got back?

RB: No, I joined it in Peru.

KP: In Peru, you joined.

RB: Yes, there were so many of us there, ex-GIs. I mean, after the war, the American companies, by the way, went back into business. They had been there before the war, but it was kind of left in limbo during the war and, after the war, they wanted to go back in and start their operations again, but, now, it was ex-GIs that were going to be manning the fortress. So, there were a lot of us there, very friendly, the General Motors guy, the Johnson & Johnson, that's me, the 3M guy, the Caterpillar Tractor--you name it, they were there. At that time, Pan American Airways had a joint venture with Grace Lines, the shipping company, and it was called Panagra, Pan American Grace, Panagra, and all the pilots were American ex-GIs, all the pilots for Braniff were ex-GIs. In fact, they had their headquarters there for maintenance of the planes, in Lima. So, there were so many of us that we formed an American Legion, Peru Post #1. [laughter]

KP: Did you have a Legion hall?

RB: No, we used to rent places. There was a big restaurant usually we'd go, (La Cabanya?), a big restaurant that we would take over during our meetings and everybody would have lunch there, and then, everybody would stay in the afternoon and just bat the breeze. We were our own bosses; we didn't have to go back to work. [laughter]

KP: This is the positive side of being your own boss.

RB: Oh, of course.

KP: You cannot do it all the time.

RB: Well, you wouldn't, but, on occasion, sure.

KP: It sounds like, being part of this World War II group, you really had a common bond with people that you might not normally have had that bond. That gave you a bond, all having gone through the military together, in different branches, but you all had the same experience.

RB: That's a bond that you can't explain. It's a bond that goes much deeper than your classmate in school. It even can go beyond a brother or sister type of bond, because you were in a war together. You can't explain this. It's something that's in you.

KP: In terms of the men you trained with and served with in your communications company, did you stay in touch with any of them?

RB: No, I went to South America, so, I lost …

KP: You lost touch with them.

RB: I lost touch with everybody.

KP: You have never run into anyone you served with.

RB: Two. Now, this was about three years ago. Somehow, I guess when I wrote the memoirs, I sent a copy to the fellow that is in charge of *The Timberwolf*, I don't know what it's called, *Timberwolf*, it's a tabloid that comes out every six months or so about Timberwolves, the guy that runs it. So, I sent him a copy, and then, he said, "Why don't you join the Timberwolves?" and I said, "Well, I didn't know they existed. I just knew about you," and he said, "Oh, no, we exist. We get together every year, in different parts of the country, and, if you join, I'll send you a list of the people that are in it." I said fine. So, I did that and, when I got the list, I found out that there were two radio operators, because it shows by company, regiment, battalion and the signal company, headquarters company, the field artillery and the rest of it. So, I looked down the list at the 104th Signal Company and there were two guys, one that lives on the Main Line just outside Philadelphia and the other lives up here in North Jersey. So, I figured, "Gee, I'm going to get together with these guys." So, I went to them. Oh, they were delighted. They had no idea I was alive and I didn't know they existed either, they still existed. So, we get together every once in a while. Once or twice a year, we get together, the three couples.

KP: That sounds nice. You have never gone to a reunion though.

RB: No, I haven't, and they went. That's how they met each other, but they said there was nobody there from signal except one guy, one lieutenant. They didn't know the guys in the infantry there. So, at this point, you feel like you really don't have that much in common, even though they're buddies and everything, still, it's different; like, when you went through, you knew the guy that you were with.

KP: You were active in the American Legion in Peru. Did you stay active with the Legion? Are you active in any other Legion, in Metuchen?

RB: I belong to--I'm not active, but I belong to the Legion, the post here in Metuchen, yes. I also became a Mason in Peru, and yet, strangely enough--are you a Mason?

KP: No.

RB: Well, it's not a Blue Lodge; they call them Blue Lodges here. Ours is a lodge that's affiliated with the Grand Lodge of Scotland and most of the people that started the lodge in Peru were English people that were there building the railroad long before the war, and even during the war, they were there in some capacity. Then, the Americans came and they rejoined them and we got together and there was an English-speaking [lodge], the only English-speaking lodge in Peru. There's a lot of Spanish-speaking lodges, even though it's a Catholic country--in fact, most of the countries in Latin America are Catholic--but, still, there's a lot of Masonic lodges down there. They co-exist.

KP: Going back to your postwar career, I remember in the 1970s, but it goes back to the 1960s in particular, there was a lot of controversy over American multinational companies. The American economy was just more powerful at the time, so, some of those concerns have

dissipated, but what were your thoughts in terms of the impact that your company and the American multinationals were having on other countries? In retrospect, there were clearly positive things. A lot of countries that, in the 1960s, were clearly underdeveloped are now competitive with the United States. What were your thoughts at the time, both of the criticisms and the positives?

RB: Shortly after the war, when I joined Johnson & Johnson, in fact, when I went to Peru, when I first went to Peru, which is back in '47, America had five percent of the world's population and produced ninety-eight percent of the world's consumer goods. That's how it was. So, it was a wide-open world, wide-open market for Americans, because the competition was not there anymore. Little by little, they started coming in, the Germans first, and then, the Japanese, but with very poor quality, pre-war quality, and then, the British. So, that's how it was, but, little by little, we started relinquishing market share. It was still growing, but we didn't have ninety percent or we didn't have eighty percent or we didn't have seventy percent. So, that's how it was, but it was pretty much a buyer's market in the beginning and how I managed to keep my--and, by the way, they were coming in, sometimes, with lower prices, too, because, here, the unions were upping the selling scales and the prices kept going up--but how I managed to keep my clientele was by helping them during the times when there wasn't enough merchandise to go around. The hospitals would give me orders for gauze and for adhesive tape or sutures, everything that J&J produced, and we couldn't always provide it, particularly the gauze, because sutures you could make, but gauze, it has to come from the cotton and, sometimes, it depends on the cotton mills, and so forth. So, I would go to a hospital that just received a hundred bolts of gauze and I would say, "I have an order from the Hospital (Loayza?)," that's a different hospital, "and they haven't gotten their merchandise yet. They're very much in need. I would like to borrow ten bolts from you and I'll give you an IOU and, the next time, when you come close to running out, and it's going to happen, then, I'll get some for you from somebody else." "Oh," they said, "well, that makes sense." So, I did that and they were very appreciative, because, obviously, hospitals can't do without gauze and they didn't have it, and so, when the hospital got their new order of a hundred or two hundred, whatever it was, they gave me back, gladly, the ten. I brought it back to this guy or I'd loan it to somebody else, and nobody did that. Nobody even thought of doing anything like that, but, when it came time for the competition in, they said, "Well, this Bustamante guy, look what he's doing for us." So, J&J may not have realized it, but I was doing a lot of things for them, too, unbeknownst to them, but that's why they had me there and that's what makes an individual an individual.

KP: I get the impression that it could really vary depending on the company, in terms of how it impacted a society.

RB: Well, in pharmaceuticals and in health, they had to have those things. Consumer goods, like other things, like, for example, the Gillette guy, well, they needed his products, but they could do without, you know what I mean? There's a difference there.

KP: Were there any countries that were particularly frustrating to deal with? You mentioned that you had a hard time in China.

RB: No, I didn't have a hard time in China.

KP: However, culturally, you sound like you preferred the Japanese.

RB: Yes, but it wasn't culturally, it was the way they did business and it was the overseas Chinese. The overseas Chinese don't live in China. They live in Singapore, they live in Hong Kong, they live in Indonesia and they run the business places in all these areas. They're Chinese, but they're not from China; I mean, they're from China, but they're not Chinese born. So, these are the overseas Chinese. They call them, well, the "Arabs of the Orient," because the Arabs are like that, too, but, no, I didn't. I can't remember having had that talk. I get asked a lot of times, "Of all the places you've been, which is your favorite country?" and I say, "From the standpoint of what? It all depends, scenic beauty, the friendliness of the people, the business connections, the climate, what? It all depends." "Oh, I hadn't thought of that." This is a big, flat, stupid question, really, because it doesn't make any sense, but I don't consider it stupid, I just think it doesn't make sense.

KP: Yes, for you, it has become more complicated.

RB: For me, yes, but, no, for example, they ask me, "Which is your favorite city?" I said, "Well, it all depends. If you're talking about ports, oh, the most glamorous and most beautiful port in the world I would say is Rio de Janeiro and, yet, to me, (Bajea?) is a lovelier place than Rio by far, but, as a port, there are three, in the whole world, there are only three ports that I would say are top notch, Rio de Janeiro, Sydney, Australia and Hong Kong, and that's it, but that's only from the point of view of a port city. It all depends on what you're asking." "You liked the Australians?" "I loved the Australians. They're terrific." The only ones, the only people that have been less than friendly in general are the French, but everybody knows that. If you don't speak French, they look down on you. [laughter] Even in Tahiti, would you imagine, the native Tahitians, which are French-speaking, but, anyway, even they think that everybody that doesn't speak French is not educated. [laughter]

KP: You mentioned earlier, during your South African trip, you encountered a woman salesman. How unique was that in that time period? It sounds like that was tremendously unique.

RB: Well, it would be very unique in this country. It wasn't unique there, or in Australia, but here it would have been very unique. I didn't know any.

KP: Yes. Why in South Africa and Australia had women become pharmaceuticals salesmen earlier than the US?

RB: I don't know why. I just assumed that because of, during the war, so many guys were gone, but they were back.

KP: Yes, it was striking that you were surprised by it.

RB: Yes.

KP: Were they former nurses, the pharmaceuticals salespeople?

RB: Not that I know of. They could have been, but it was not a prerequisite.

KP: Were those the only two places that you encountered them?

RB: Yes, yes. In South America, I never encountered them.

KP: Not in other Asian countries.

RB: No, but I didn't give sales classes in the other Asian countries, so, I don't know. Most of those countries, we didn't have distributors, so, I was doing path-finding work. I was establishing a network of distributors in Pakistan, in Thailand, in Singapore, in Hong Kong, the rest of it.

KP: A lot of the cultures you were dealing with were very male cultures. It would have been very tough, and probably still is, for woman executives from America.

RB: Oh, extremely. In some places, they wouldn't even have been accepted. I told you, even a male wouldn't be accepted in Japan if you didn't drink.

KP: Yes, a teetotaler definitely …

RB: No. I mean, how square can you get? [laughter]

KP: What about cigarettes? Did you ever smoke cigarettes?

RB: Yes, I did, during the war.

KP: During the war. It was a wartime habit.

RB: I guess so, yes. I gave it up when I lived in Peru.

KP: In any societies, did you notice any difference in terms of smoking that struck you?

RB: Yes, Japan, well, I guess the whole Far East, but, basically, particularly Japan, is nothing but one big smudge pot. Even the women there in the Ginza, they're not geishas, but they are a bar [girl] type of thing, smoking all the time, all the time, awful, and they love jazz. They love American jazz.

KP: Did you ever think that you would like to finish your college degree, that it would help your career?

RB: I didn't have time. No, I just didn't. I would have liked to; I mean, basically, sure. Why not? but I didn't have the time. It was hard enough finding time to spend here with Doris.

KP: When you were a vice president, how often would you be at home?

RB: Oh, I would make three or four trips a year, about a month each. That's about it.

KP: You were gone from home for four months. [laughter] That is a long time.

RB: Yes, it is, sometimes five weeks. It depends, but I would be gone quite a while, but it was great, first class all the way.

KP: Did your wife ever come with you on your trips?

RB: No. We went together on vacation to the Caribbean or to Bermuda, something like that, but not far away, no.

KP: Not any Hong Kong vacation.

RB: No. I wouldn't in any case. I knew that …

KP: It sounds like the Japan trip would be pretty miserable for a spouse. Is there anything that I forgot to ask you about your post-World War II career? It has been very intriguing.

RB: No, but I have some "dos and don'ts" for people about Japan. I liked Japan, first of all, because it's such a major market. It's the second-largest market in the world. So, naturally, I concentrated on Japan. Secondly, it's a fascinating place. I loved to go to Japan. In fact, when I was at the airport, ready to depart from Japan, I was already thinking of my next trip to Japan. I was already planning my next trip, I liked it that much, and they were good people. Oh, let's see if I can find "dos and don'ts" here [in his memoirs] on Japan. It's toward the conclusion. Well, this is for the high school kids.

KP: It sounds like you very much wanted to go into the international end of business.

RB: Yes.

KP: Do you think international is as promising still for people who want to go and have a career in business?

RB: Yes, it is, but in a different way. Today, it's a marketing skill, it's a technology skill that you need. I know people, kids that have graduated from college that live on this block, that are doing just that, are teaching people overseas how to use computers and all that sort of thing. So, this is a skill that you have to acquire, if you're in the 21st Century and America is head and shoulders above everybody else. So, there are a lot of opportunities. In the type of work that I used to do, less, because we got to the point where it was almost impossible to keep Americans overseas, for two reasons--number one, because they were too expensive and they wanted too many fringe benefits, but, more important than that, because of the wives, a pain in the ass, excuse me.

KP: No, that is fine. [laughter]

RB: You couldn't keep them happy. "The sky wasn't blue over there," that sort of thing. The wives were just impossible. I sent a man to the Philippines, an American who I thought was a very good district manager here, from Ayerst, when I established the company. He didn't last a year. He liked it, he was happy--his wife wasn't. So, what are you going to do? So, they get to the point where you say, "The heck with it." So, we started hiring local people and promoting from within, all the way up to the presidency of the affiliate, of the subsidiary, and that's how it's done basically these days, too. It's a lot less expensive, you don't have to change personnel so much and there's no guarantee that you're going to be superior by sending an American here.

KP: It sounds like international business changed over the course of your career. When you started out, it was really sending an American out there to do it all and to run things. Now, increasingly, you often have people come out to advise, but it is really up to the local operation.

RB: That's right. Well, you can still have an American for a while, but just temporarily, just to set things up, but you don't need the office. There's no monopoly on brains. There's an expression, "If it's not made here," what is it, the not made here thing? "It's no good." Well, that's out the window.

KP: You were very adept at picking up other cultures. Were there arrogant American companies who really did think that all the brains resided in the United States?

RB: There still are, many.

KP: Yes.

RB: I think, I'm not sure, but I think one of the reasons why I was successful in infiltrating these various cultures, if you will, is because I didn't have trouble passing for a South American, I had no trouble passing for a Middle Easterner, I had no trouble passing, in the Philippines, for one of these Spaniards, that they still have Spanish from the old days. Then, of course, in the English-speaking countries, I had no problem at all. So, it was easy for me. You would have a harder time in South America, because you're a *gringo*, obviously.

KP: Yes.

RB: And I wasn't. So, that's how it works sometimes.

KP: It sounds like you really enjoyed these different cultures and learning the differences between cultures.

RB: Oh, I loved it.

KP: Whereas some people would, in fact, be very resistant. I imagine some executives were very resistant to this process.

RB: And even if they're not resistant, we had executives in the home office of Ayerst in New York who could never understand somebody who came from overseas, who spoke English, but with an accent, or not too good English, and it's very embarrassing, because the poor guy was trying his best and this guy, it wasn't his fault either, but he just couldn't understand it. I've never had trouble understanding people, no matter how badly they speak English, to understand them or to try to understand them and help them out, but some people just can't. So, it's inherent in the individual, I don't know. [laughter] Let's see, I was [reading from my memoirs], okay, "Re: Japan." This is the conclusion, because if anybody wants to do business with Japan, that's the second-largest market in the world and this is where I would go, if I were twenty years, fifteen years younger, okay. [laughter] "If you're a teetotaler, stay away." I told you this. "Puritans, stay home. Leave the international to the hell-[bent]-for-leather boys." This is what I would tell--I will tell them--these high school kids. "In Japan, as in Korea, social drinking is a must." I told you this, Korea, probably even worse than Japan. They're terrible, but, there, they try to get you drunk without them being drunk, which is a no-no, and some people fall for this. [laughter] At least the Japanese will drink with you. "Your host will try to get you drunk in Korea. Smaller Orientals can't hold their liquor as well as you can, so, try to indulge them, but, still, don't ever get drunk, because, once you lose your senses, you're at their mercy and that's a problem. So, the trick, when they're drunk, they'll tell you things that they shouldn't tell you about your business, but they want to get you drunk so [that] you will tell them." So, the next don't is, well, the trick is here, "Listen and don't talk, and be aware that the Japanese have three ways of saying no. They never say no. The word 'N-O' is taboo, but they say three ways of saying yes, which one is a yes that means yes, one is a yes that means maybe and the third is a yes that means no." [laughter] That's how I learned how to differentiate between them; that's what I tell them. I wrote down here, "Why do you single out Japan? Because it's the most important market, second-largest market in the world next to the US. Besides, it's one of the most fun countries to visit, but most difficult to penetrate. Look at the efforts of Clinton and trade representative Mickey Kantor." For example, in Japan, you would never sit the way you're sitting, showing me your heels.

KP: Really? How would you sit?

RB: No way. I mean, if you're going to cross your legs, you cross them this way, yes, but not this way. Oh, that's an offense, see, and people don't know that.

KP: Yes. That is very subtle.

RB: Exactly. People do it unintentionally, because they don't know it. So, these are the little things that you pick up; go figure. "Don'ts: Don't assume anything, ever, particularly if you know more than the other guy. Don't make commitments," oh, this is very important, "without authorization from the home office." You just cannot make a commitment, and people sometimes do, and then, the company is stuck. So, this is another important thing. "Don't badmouth America." Many guys do, particularly when they get drunk, "Oh, my country, this and that." Guys that have never lived overseas, they just go on an occasional trip and they don't know the difference, they don't realize that this is the greatest country in the world and you have to live overseas to know that, to realize it, but, sometimes, people are just naturally--they think they're ingratiating themselves to their host by badmouthing their fellow countrymen. It's just

the opposite, because the Japanese say, "Well, if he says that about," to himself, "he says that about his own country, what's he going to say about me?" So, these are things that you have to know, be very much aware of. So, I say, "If you don't badmouth your fellow countrymen or your country, this will hold you in much higher esteem than badmouthing. Foreigners will never criticize." They don't. Can you imagine a Frenchman criticizing France? They don't. We're the ones that do this. I don't know if you're aware of it, but I am, because I've been there. I've seen them at cocktail parties doing that and it hurts, because I would never do that. I fought for my country. Well, I guess, as I say here, "I guess it's because we're used to criticizing our politicians unmercifully," and we do that. I do that. That's okay here, but it's not okay there. "So, maybe this is why Americans sometimes badmouth them, simply because we're used to badmouthing the politicians."

KP: It sounds like, in the United States, you might badmouth Clinton to no end.

RB: Sure.

KP: However, if you were in Japan, you would say, "He is the President."

RB: Absolutely, absolutely, and this is the way it's expected and they're shocked if you don't do that. You think you're getting away with it, you think you're being smart--no way, it'll be cause for concern. They will figure out, because that's it, "If he says that about him?" and another no, a very important no-no, "Don't discuss politics or religion--strictly a no-no, ever." I mean, there's so many religions in this world, you're not going to get involved. When they say, "What do you think?"--when I was [in Japan], there's a fellow that was going to be nominated for Prime Minister. They called him Kaku-san [Kakuei Tanaka, Prime Minister of Japan from July 1972 to December 1974] and they'd say, "What do you think of Kaku-san?" I said, "I don't know. I have my ideas, but I can't say, because it's your country, not mine. I worry about my own," and that's it. They know. They understand. So, anyway, I guess I've talked more than I should.

KP: No, this has been fun. I think you left a good record. [laughter] Is there anything that I forgot to ask you about?

RB: I think we've covered just about everything.

KP: One question I forgot to ask you about World War II, did you ever encounter any chaplains when you were in the Army?

RB: Yes. Oh, well, there was chaplains in every unit. Every outfit had a chaplain. In fact, we had more than one, because we had rabbis and chaplains, but it wasn't until after the war, in Peru, actually, that Father (McCarthy?) was the chaplain for the American Legion Post #1 and we got very close to him, because he was of our generation. Later on, when I moved to New York, he was within--I forget what unit of the Catholic Church he was in--Maryknoll Fathers, that's what it was, and Maryknoll had an office in New York. I found out, later on, that Father (McCarthy?), until very recently, had been there. I would have loved to have seen him in New York and chatted with him, had dinner with him or something, but he was gone by the time I found out that he had been there. So, I didn't get a chance to see him, but, yes, we had chaplains.

KP: Did you attend services at all during the war?

RB: Yes, on occasion. I've never been a very religious guy, but on occasion. When you're overseas particularly, you're in danger, you become religious, if not in attendance, certainly within yourself and in your prayers, no question about that.

KP: There is something to be said that there are no atheists in foxholes.

RB: Absolutely, absolutely--at least I never met one. [laughter]

KP: Thank you very much, I really appreciate it. I am glad you filled out the survey and I appreciate your patience.

RB: You're very welcome. It was fun going through it, I'll tell you. I'm reminiscing about these things. It's kind of interesting.

----------END OF INTERVIEW----------

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 7/24/2014
Reviewed by Pedro Romero 8/17/2014